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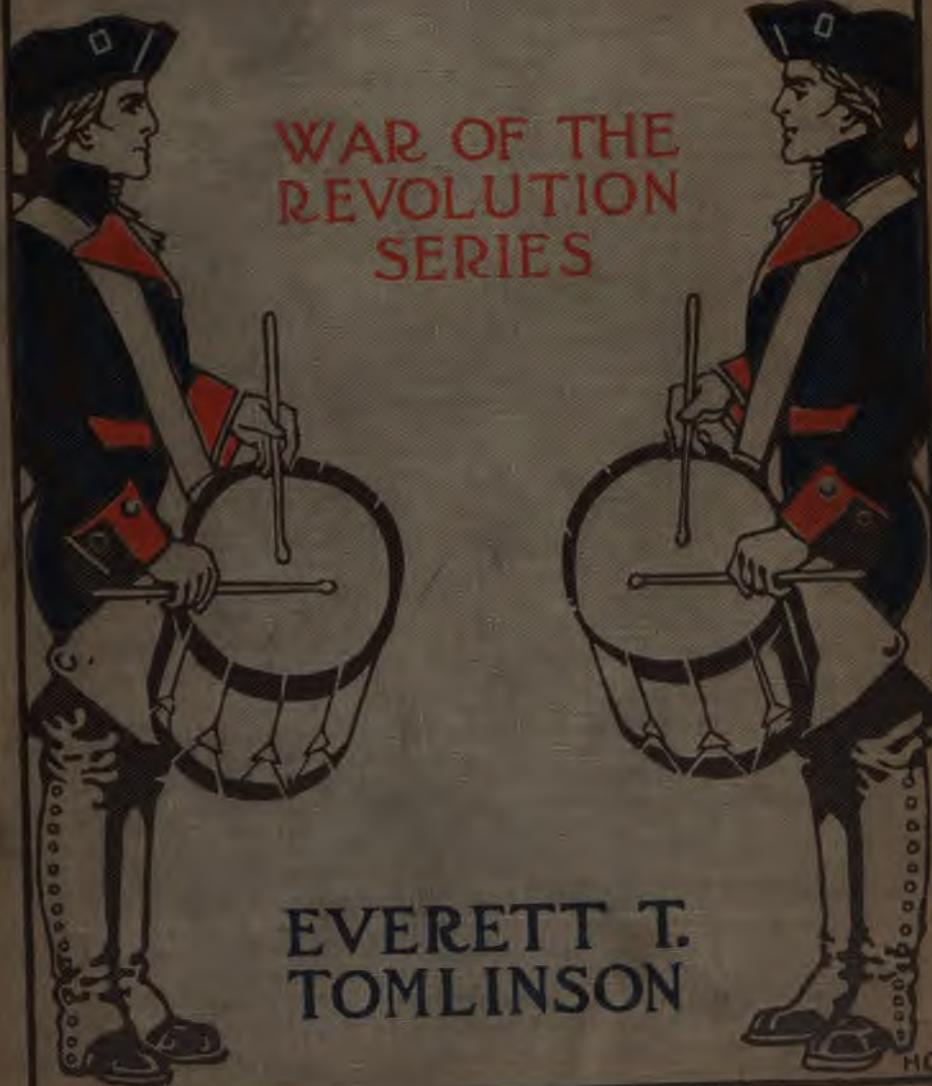
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IN THE CAMP OF CORNWALLIS

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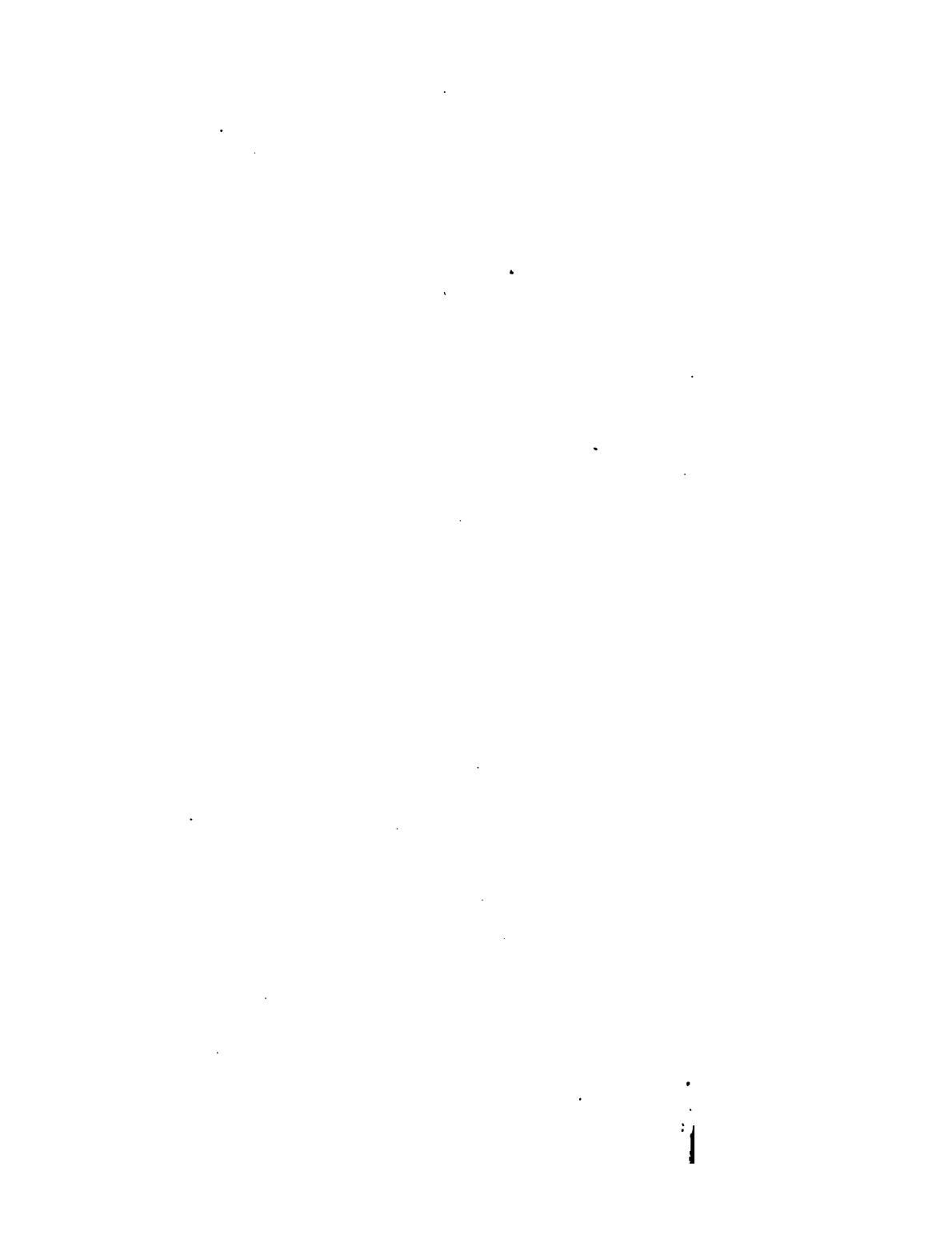
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In the Camp of Cornwallis



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"UNCLE PHILEMON HIMSELF APPEARED IN THE DOORWAY"

In the Camp of Cornwallis

BEING

*The Story of Reuben Denton and his
Experiences during the New
Jersey Campaign of 1777*

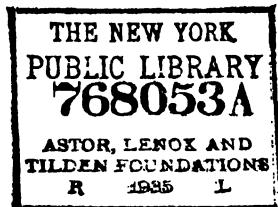
BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES COPELAND



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IN THE CAMP OF CORNWALLIS.

NEW YORK
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1902

Preface

"THIS campaign has attracted far less attention than it deserves, mainly, no doubt, because it contained no battles or other striking incidents. It was purely a series of strategic devices. But in point of military skill it was, perhaps, as remarkable as anything that Washington ever did, and it certainly occupies a cardinal position in the history of the overthrow of Burgoyne. For if Howe had been able to take Philadelphia early in the summer (1777), it is difficult to see what could have prevented him from returning and ascending the Hudson, in accordance with the plan of the ministry." — JOHN FISKE, *The American Revolution*, Volume I, page 317.

1935

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In this tale I have endeavored to afford my young readers a glimpse into the trying days of 1777. Many of the incidents which have been incorporated in this book are true, and are recorded in the earlier histories.

If, through the interest in the story, the young people may be led to make further investigations of their own

PREFACE

in this part of our national history, and shall come to appreciate the strength of character and power of conviction then displayed by the men whom all the world now honors, the writer of this story will feel that his labor has not been in vain.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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In the Camp of Cornwallis

CHAPTER I

TIMES OF TROUBLE

“**I** KNEW I could step on the head of my shadow,
and 'twas high time I heard that call.”

Faint and indistinct the musical notes of a conch shell had come across the meadow lands, and, penetrating the shadows of the “openings” where Reuben Denton was at work, had caused him to swing his axe over his shoulder, and, with a smile on his face and a sturdy stride of his muscular body, to set forth on his return to his father’s house, a full half-mile away, for the dinner hour had come and he was ready for its coming.

Since sunrise Reuben had been following the line of fence that marked the boundaries of the farm, and had been strengthening a stake or replacing a missing rail with a sapling which his axe enabled him to cut from the growth near by.

For the three cows and the two “three-year-old” colts, all that remained of the stock that belonged to the

place only two years before this time, had been turned out to pasture the preceding day, and, with the perversity that is more or less inherent in all created things, had not been content to remain within the confines of the land that extended along the banks of the river, where already the grass was growing rank and thick, but had broken a way through the fences where a bank of snow or a wintry wind had made a partial opening, and tempted the cattle to seek pastures new in the fond belief that the new must necessarily be the better.

While Cato, the oldest of the negroes on the Denton farm, had gone to search for the stragglers, Reuben at the same time had taken his axe, and all the forenoon had been busily repairing the places where the cattle might be able to find other weak spots in the confines of the fields.

For there was special need of caution, now that the regulars were in Brunswick on one side, and at Bound Brook, about as far distant on the other, was a force of Continentals, the uttermost outposts of the main body which throughout the winter had been encamped at Morristown.

With the coming of spring there were prospects of renewed activity in both camps, and stragglers and foraging parties from either army were not wont to inquire too closely into the ownership of stray cattle.

It therefore behooved the Jersey farmers to look well to their possessions, and Reuben Denton had just been

doing what many another lusty farmer lad in the vicinity was also striving to do.

As he came out from the openings, he halted for a moment as he gained the summit of a knoll and gazed about him. The songs of the birds that had already returned—for the spring was unusually “early”—filled the air that was fragrant with the breath of woods and fields. The light of the sun, now almost directly over his head, was mellow and warm. Trees were beginning to don their summer suits of green, and the willows that grew thick along parts of the shore of the Raritan were already clothed in their soft summer garb.

The river itself, its banks well filled by the recent spring rains, as it curved and wound on its way around the wooded shores, flashed like a band of silver and added greatly to the beauty of the landscape. Not far away he could discern the comfortable buildings that belonged to his father, the little huts occupied by the negroes, and the barns all glistening in the sunlight in their fresh coats of whitewash, and even the fences that enclosed the barnyards, all standing spotless in their appearance, for they too had received their annual coat.

Quiet and peace rested over the low hillsides and the fertile valley, and as Reuben Denton gazed about him the beauty of it all impressed him afresh, for he was a boy to whom the country life was a perpetual source of delight.

It was only four years before this spring of 1777

when the Denton family had purchased this land and removed from New York, where the population was becoming so dense that Mr. Denton had declared he could endure it no longer. He did not object to neighbors or to being neighborly, he explained, but when it came to pass that he was compelled to hear the remarks of others at their own firesides, and he was not certain but his own secret thoughts, even, might be overheard by the occupants of the adjoining house, it was high time to move out. When it is known that New York at that time contained hardly twenty thousand inhabitants, the fear of the sturdy colonial seems not to have been entirely without foundation.

At all events, the family belongings had been packed on board a schooner at the foot of Whitehall, and the voyage through Amboy Bay and up the winding Raritan had been successfully made, and for four years Reuben Denton now had been dwelling on the banks of the beautiful river.

In the winter he had gone, with his two elder brothers, to the grammar school of Queen's College in Brunswick town, and though some of the Dutch lads had continued to be as much strangers to him after months of daily classwork done for the "Rector," or Dominie, as they had been at the beginning, nevertheless he had made good progress in his studies and likewise some friends in the quaint town, as it was even in these far-away days of the Revolution.

But the summer days had been those in which his greatest pleasure was found. He toiled in the fields, and helped to harvest the crops, but the labor was never severe, and there was always ample opportunity for sailing or fishing on the Raritan, or for sport with his gun in the sombre forests that then abounded.

And as the summers and autumns passed, it was a delight to the elder Dentons to mark the steady growth and increase in the strength of Reuben. All the fears his mother had had for him in his childhood—for he had been a delicate lad—were gone now, and his broad shoulders and springing step betokened health and strength as well as youth. Indeed, there were few lads of his age, now that he was seventeen, who cared to test his strength in a wrestling bout or pull upon the oars. Fair-haired, blue-eyed, with a countenance that showed a kindly feeling as well as strength, Reuben Denton, as he stood for the moment upon the summit of the knoll and looked out over the beautiful scene before him, was himself no small part of the sight, or at least he would have been to any one who might have chanced to see him in the sunshine of the mild spring day.

"Cato has found the cattle, but the colts are gone," said his father, when Reuben joined the family at the dinner table.

"Which means that you want me to go and look them up, I suppose," laughed Reuben, in response.

"Yes, Reuben, that's just what your father wants," said his mother, quietly. "He goes to Bound Brook with me."

Reuben looked up quickly as his mother spoke, for his two elder brothers, Robert and Philip, were in the camp there, and a visit to the place was always an event in the family life, in spite of the nearness of the little force. Mrs. Denton smiled, as she continued; "I want to see them again, for they may soon leave the camp at Bound Brook, and as they can't come to me, I must go to them."

Mrs. Denton spoke quietly, but Reuben and the three younger children about the table, as well as the father himself, well knew what that quiet manner in the mother betokened.

"Is there any news?" inquired Reuben, eagerly.

"Not a thing," said his father, quickly. "Both armies stand off and crow at each other like two roosters, and, for my part, I shan't be broken-hearted if they'll keep it up all summer; that is, if they'll leave me and my place alone. Some seem to think this matter of calling names and shaking fists is war. Well, mayhap it is, but if Robert and Phil were only at home, I'd be content to let the war go on forever, if that was all there was to be to it."

"That isn't all there is to be to it," said Mrs. Denton, quietly.

"Well, why don't they do something then, and let

Bob and Phil come back home where they belong? Here's all our spring work to be done, and nobody knows how soon the redcoats at Brunswick may take it into their heads to come out here and seize everything we own."

"There won't be any use in doing the spring work if that's to be the end."

"Yes, but I need both the boys at home. General Washington told me it was all right for me to be a neutral, for I asked him myself. But it's hard work to persuade some of these redcoats at Brunswick that I really am a neutral when my two boys are in Maxwell's force. It's a hard place to put a man in."

"There are other hard places, too," said his wife, quietly. "We've all of us got to do the best we can, I think, wherever we are, till the end comes."

"There won't be any end. It'll be just like it is up at Uncle Philemon's house, a war all the time—with words anyway. By the way, Reuben, you'd better stop and get Uncle Philemon to go with you and help you look up those colts."

"I shan't need him, I'm sure. The colts can't be far away."

"I'd stop for him if I were you," said his mother, gently, and Reuben made no further protest.

To his mother he gave a love and respect that were as rare as they were beautiful. She it was who always understood him and appealed to the best that was in

him. It mattered not whether it was in his school work, his games, or in his tasks on the farm, it was her word that calmed or inspired him, and it was to her he turned with a freedom that was rare in those days when children were taught, first of all, that their place was not foremost even in the circle of the home.

It was his mother who had encouraged his brothers to enter the army; and though his father had querulously protested, the boys had nevertheless quietly obeyed their mother's words, confident that it was her way, and therefore must be right.

As for Mr. Denton, the father, a long illness several years before this time, had left him in a state of nervous collapse, from which he had not as yet recovered. At least, his faithful wife declared that the illness was the cause of his present condition, and as even the older children had no recollection of any previous state or condition, no member of the family was inclined to dispute or even to disbelieve the word of the mother, who they all knew was to be trusted implicitly.

Nevertheless, the attitude of Mr. Denton was one that was sadly perplexing to Reuben. There were days when his father, to all appearances, would be heartily in accord with Robert and Philip, and his heart would respond to the silent appeals of the struggling colonists. At such time, Reuben, who had all of a younger brother's confidence in an elder brother's actions, would feel his heart swell up with pride, and

he would even venture to declare that he would soon join Bob and Phil, and be a Continental himself. Then the mood of his father would suddenly change, and he would bemoan the uselessness of the struggle and the certain ruin that would speedily overwhelm all. "They were all a pack of lunatics or worse," he would declare petulantly, "and any one with half an eye could see that starvation was right before them."

Whether it was Reuben's incredulity as to the seeing power of any one with but "half an eye," or the calm, quiet patriotism of his mother, he did not understand; but his own intense feeling for the cause in which his two brothers had entered, and that absorbed so much of his mother's thought and time, never wavered, and though he had not secured the consent to join his brothers in the camp, he was none the less interested in the struggle, and the very fact that forces from each of the two contending armies were now so near his home, naturally tended to increase the feeling he already had.

At all events, when, after the departure of his father and mother for Bound Brook, he himself started for the abode of Uncle Philemon, the strange, unaccountable old man who dwelt with an aged sister in a little hut in the woods about a half-mile back from the road, near the Denton homestead, his thoughts were far more of the tents and huts, the drums and fifes, the uniforms and guns, of the soldiers with General Maxwell, than

they were of the two missing colts. But before the night fell, even the camp of the hardy soldiers, and the strange actions of Uncle Philemon, who on that day was unusually "odd" in his words and manner, were forgotten in the greater excitement that soon possessed the heart of Reuben Denton.

CHAPTER II

UNCLE PHILEMON

“UNCLE PHILEMON,” as has been hinted in the preceding chapter, was one of the “characters” of the region in which Reuben Denton had his home in the trying times of the Revolution.

He was a man at least sixty years of age, bent, and misshapen, his long body appearing decidedly lank in the strange clothing he wore, his long, protruding, unshaven jaw imparting a peculiar aspect to his face, a peculiarity which was intensified by the dark, shaggy eyebrows, which protruded far over his deep-set, piercing, black eyes. His garb was as peculiar as his face and form, for with an utter disregard of the fashions of his times, his clothing was made by his sister Nancy; and skins of wild beasts, and the wool and flax which their own possessions afforded, were strangely mixed in the composition.

A huge cap, made of skins, from which a long, bushy tail hung down over his shoulders, increased the strangeness of his appearance, and made him a man whose name and garb were well known throughout the region.

His manner and words were, however, as peculiar as his personal appearance, and Uncle Philemon never took any pains to correct or change the impression which he was well aware his coming always produced. Harmless he was, and gentle in his disposition, but with all the tenacity of his might, mind, and strength he clung to his belief in the virtue and value of certain signs and superstitions.

Ghosts were his special delight, and witches and hobgoblins his familiar friends. No story, however improbable in itself, seemed to stagger his credulous mind, except that of the earth turning on its axis, or sweeping forward on its orbit. A reference to this theory always brought a snort of disgust from Uncle Philemon, who required nothing more than the evidence of his own eyes to convince him that the sun every day rose above the woods behind his cabin, and every night disappeared from sight in the woods on the farther side of the Raritan.

"Book larnin'" was his particular object of contempt, and he was ever free to express his opinion of those who accepted the opinions of scholars committed to print. As he himself could neither read nor write, there was no method by which his prejudice could be overcome, and accordingly, Uncle Philemon was undisturbed by any of the wiser people of the neighborhood.

Among the negroes he was an object of veneration, and many a slave sought his lonely abode in the night-

time, to secure a charm to keep off the evil spirits, or the interpretation of a dream which had troubled the sleep of the dusky servant. Wild-eyed, and with chattering teeth, the slaves left Uncle Philemon's abode to return to their own quarters, but the fascination of his "tokens" and interpretations remained unbroken.

Even the white boys, who played many a prank upon the credulous Philemon, were nevertheless somewhat in awe of him, and after listening to his weird tales of a summer evening, would return to their homes with strange tremors creeping up and down their backs, in spite of their noisy attempts to laugh at the tales they had heard, or the whistling in which they indulged, in passing some graveyard or lonely spot, to keep up their courage.

But Mr. Denton had understood thoroughly the value of Uncle Philemon's knowledge of woodcraft when he had directed Reuben to seek his aid in searching for the lost horses, and even Reuben himself, in spite of his boyish confidence in his own superior knowledge, was in no wise averse to receiving the assistance which the strange man might be able to afford him.

Accordingly, when he approached the log hut in which Uncle Philemon and his sister dwelt, he was rejoiced to see the dogs about the yard, for he was instantly aware that the man he was seeking was at home.

The low growls of the dogs ceased as soon as they perceived who the newcomer was, for Reuben was well

known to all the inhabitants of the place; and in a moment Uncle Philemon himself appeared in the doorway.

"Good day to you, Uncle Philemon," called Reuben, cheerily, as he drew near. "How are you and Aunt Nancy this afternoon?"

No reply was given to the friendly greeting, but the expression in the man's eyes showed Reuben that he was welcome, and he at once entered the house.

"There! you touched me," said Uncle Philemon, sharply, as Reuben took from his hand the low wooden chair he held forth to his visitor. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten," said the old man, quickly, and at the same time he turned himself three times quickly about; "maybe that'll fix it, but I'm afraid not."

"Why, what's wrong? What have I done?" inquired Reuben, blankly.

"You touched me, and I never have any luck when anybody touches me, when he comes for me to go out along with him. Maybe I've broken the spell, for I counted ten and turned round three times before ye spoke."

"I hope so," said Reuben, with a laugh. "But how did you know I had come for you to go anywhere with me?"

"I dreamed it last night. I dreamed I met ye over at Brunswick, and that meant that you'd come for me or meet me to-day."

"Well, I'm glad you were expecting me, for there's nothing like being all ready. Father wanted me to stop here and get you to go with me to look up our two colts. They got out last night, and we can't find them."

"Yes, I'll go with ye," responded Uncle Philemon. "Just wait for me to change my shoes, and I'll be all ready. We'd never find anything if I wore these moccasins."

"All right, I'm glad there's nothing else to wait for. It's better luck than I expected."

In a brief time Uncle Philemon returned to the room, and as Reuben glanced at his feet he noticed that the moccasins, or shoes, which the old man had donned were fastened by buckles that were quaint and new to him. The buckles were of silver, nearly square in shape, and evidently had some strange figures or devices stamped upon them. They were also highly polished, and showed evidences of great and recent care.

"What are those buckles you have, Uncle Philemon?" inquired Reuben, aware that the question would please the old man as well as satisfy his own curiosity.

"Cob dollars."

"Cob dollars? What are they? I never heard of that kind of dollars before."

"Likely not, likely not," responded Uncle Philemon, complacently.

"But what are they?"

"Cob dollars. Isn't your hearing good? That's what I said."

"I don't know what cob dollars are, though. What are they?"

"Come on, and I'll tell you while we're on our way. If we're going to find these horses, we'd better be about it." Uncle Philemon donned his strange head-gear, and after a word with Aunt Nancy, Reuben quickly followed him.

"We'd better go to the place where ye saw their tracks," said Uncle Philemon, after they had walked in silence for a brief time. "I s'pose ye took notice o' where they got out?"

"Yes; I could follow the tracks for a little way, but then they dropped out of sight. I don't see where they could have gone."

"Likely not. Likely not. Cob dollars, as I was sayin' when ye interrupted me back there, is—is—why they're jest cob dollars, and that's all there is to 'em. Cob dollars is jest cob dollars."

"Oh, I'm glad you told me. Thank you! Thank you!" laughed Reuben.

"Long back in 1670 the Indians sold a great chunk o' land down here in Monmouth county for a barrel o' cider, and then the most o' 'em cleared out and left the region, for the Indian is a very *per-culiar* bein'. He sticks to his word when he's given it, but he's only

a savage an' uncivilized. When he gets civilized mebbe he'll learn to lie, same as these civilized white folks do over at Brunswick.

"Well, the Indians all stuck to their bargain an' left the land they'd sold, that is, all except one chap by the name o' Indian Will. He was a *per-culiar* man, an' took a notion that a barrel o' cider for six thousand or more acres o' land wasn't any bargain at all; and he said he was goin' to stay where his forefathers had lived before him, cider or no cider."

"Perhaps he didn't get his share of the cider," suggested Reuben.

"The white folks didn't mind his stayin' there," resumed Uncle Philemon, disregarding the interruption, "but his own tribe couldn't stand it nohow. They claimed that every one o' their folks was honest, an' if Indian Will wouldn't live up to th' agreement, then he shouldn't live at all. So they sent some o' their best warriors to kill him, but it didn't do any good, for Indian Will was too much for 'em every time, and after he'd killed six or eight o' 'em — in self-defence, mark ye — they gave it up, an' he was 'lowed to live on in peace. Well, he lived *in* peace, but he lived *on* the settlers.

"One mornin' he was eatin' breakfast at a Mr. Eaton's — he had suppawn and milk for his breakfast, an' he was eatin' it with a silver spoon — an' when he'd had all he wanted, he held up the spoon and told Mis' Eaton

he knew where there was a lot more just like it. She didn't pay much 'tention to what he was sayin', but her husband, he followed it up an' one day went with Indian Will and began to dig where the Indian told him to, and, sure enough, they dug up a box full o' cob dollars, every one o' 'em silver, an' just like these o' mine."

"Is that really a true story?"

"True? Course it's true! The Indians told me all about it."

"Did Indian Will get any of the money?"

"Not a bit. Not a bit. They give him a red coat an' a cocked hat."

Reuben laughed as he said, "Probably he was satisfied."

"Prob'ly he was, or he wouldn't have done it. The money wasn't any good to him, an', besides, 'twould have brought him bad luck."

"Why?"

"'Twas some o' Captain Kidd's money, that's what it was," said the old man, solemnly. "He buried a lot o' chests full o' it all along the Jersey shore."

"How do you dare have any of it, then?"

"I use 'em as buckles, and they help me to find lost things. Nobody can keep that money in his breeches' pockets. He loses it every time."

As Reuben marked the peculiar shape and sharp corners of the coins, he had no difficulty in understand-

ing that they would probably wear a hole, even in the strongest of leather pockets. But Uncle Philemon doubtless had never attributed the inability of their possessors to retain them to any such cause as that.

"Uncle Philemon, you lived with the Indians a long time yourself, didn't you?"

"Twenty-one years."

"Was it as long as that? Tell me about it."

"It was a long time ago, and I don't much like to speak of it. My mother and I—I was only about five years old at the time—was both took prisoners, and after they'd done killin' the white folks where we lived, they started off with us. My mother could understand the Indian talk, an' she heard 'em say they was goin' to kill her an' keep me. So she told me what she'd heard, and told me not to cry or take on if they did, or they would kill me, too."

"Did they kill her?" inquired Reuben, softly.

"Yes. We hadn't gone but a few rods, after she said that, before one of the Indians killed her with his tomahawk, and when they got to their village one of the squaws 'dopted me in place of the boy she'd lost a few days before. I was there for twenty-one years, and when at last I came back among the white folks, I was more Indian than I was white. It was hard work for me to get used to white folks' ways, and I can't say I like 'em very much even now."

The story of Uncle Philemon's capture and adoption

by the Indians was well known to the Jersey people, and to that was attributed many of the superstitious beliefs to which he clung so tenaciously.

"I should think you'd hate the Indians," said Reuben, sharply.

"They have their good points and their bad points, same's other folks. Here's where the tracks end, I take it," said Uncle Philemon, sharply, as if he wished to end the conversation.

"Yes," replied Reuben. "I can't find a trace of them anywhere beyond."

"Likely not. Likely not."

Uncle Philemon cut a twig from a near-by hazel bush, and after muttering various incantations over it, cast it into a little spring, whose waters bubbled forth from the ground at their feet. Kneeling for a moment in silence, he watched its movements, and then rising once more to his feet, said, "We'll find the horses right over yonder," and he pointed as he spoke toward the south.

"Come on, then," responded Reuben, quickly. "We may be able to find them and get back home before dark."

For a brief time they walked rapidly and silently in the direction indicated by the older man.

Suddenly Uncle Philemon halted, and said in a whisper, "I'm not going any farther. There's a white man following us."

"How do you know?" said Reuben, in a whisper.
"Where is he? I don't see any one."

"I've seen him, and that's enough."

"But that's no reason why we should turn back."

"Yes it is. He's crossed our tracks and our luck's gone."

"Never mind the luck. We can try, anyway."

But Uncle Philemon made no response. He turned quickly about in the woods, and almost before Reuben realized that he was gone, he had disappeared from sight among the great trees.

The first impulse in Reuben's mind was to run after him and compel him to return, but a brief reflection caused him to abandon the project. Well aware of Uncle Philemon's firm belief in the "signs" which he had declared to be unfavorable, he also knew that the old man would not swerve from his purpose.

For a moment Reuben hesitated. The flickering lights among the shadows of the giant trees proclaimed that the sun would soon be gone. Already there was a sighing among the branches that emphasized the loneliness of the place.

When darkness should fall he would not care to be alone and unarmed in the woods; but he had come to search for the missing horses, and it would not do for him to abandon the attempt on such a slight excuse as that Uncle Philemon had left him alone in the labor.

He was inclined to laugh at the old man's fears, and yet he was angry at him for his childishness.

Suddenly a strange, weird cry rose in the midst of the stillness, and Reuben, startled for the moment, quickly recovered himself and began to run swiftly through the forest.

CHAPTER III

LOST POSSESSIONS

IT was the shrill whinny of a horse that had startled Reuben Denton, and as he paused for a moment and listened intently, a sharp response was heard coming from the same direction from which the first had been heard.

Indeed, if Reuben had not been so surprised at the unexpected sound, he might have perceived that the responses evidently came from more than one horse; but in his excitement he had not waited to consider, but had begun to run eagerly in the direction from which the call had come, satisfied that now he was near the object of his search.

In his haste he stumbled once over a fallen tree and was thrown headlong upon the ground, but hastily scrambling to his feet, he rushed on, intent only upon finding the colts before they could withdraw farther into the forest. So eager was he that he was unmindful of all else, and when he suddenly came upon the object of his search, he stopped short and gazed before him as if he could not trust the evidences of his own eyes.

The missing horses were before him, and he could easily see them, but they were not alone. Within an enclosure, which had been formed by a fence of small saplings, he saw at least twenty horses, and on the farther side he perceived two men, who were talking earnestly together.

In the deepening dusk he had no difficulty in recognizing one of the men as Stephen Carle, a worthless fellow who had been well known in the region for several years; but his companion was a stranger to Reuben.

In spite of his astonishment at the sight before him, Reuben quickly stepped behind a tree, not knowing whether or not his coming had been discovered by the men. His heart was thumping so loudly against his sides that it seemed to him that it must betray him, and his breathing was so labored that it seemed for a moment as if he must cry out.

When a few moments had elapsed it became apparent that he had not been seen by either of the men, and, somewhat calmer, Reuben began to think over the problem that now presented itself to him. His first impulse had been to rush in and demand the immediate return of his horses, but even a brief reflection had enabled him to perceive that such a course would not only be perilous to himself, but that he would also be less likely to gain the object for which he had come. That twenty horses should be huddled together within

one enclosure, and that a secluded spot within the forest, was plainly not the result of chance.

Stories of the thefts of cattle and horses from the Jersey farmers flashed into his mind, and he recalled the numerous losses which some of his own neighbors had sustained.

Tories had declared that the Whigs had stolen their property, and on the other hand the Whigs, angry over their own losses, had charged the Tories with being the cause; but the sole result had been that the steadily rising rage of the people had been increased, and yet the lost horses had not been restored. But here, directly before him, Reuben could perceive two men, one of whom, at least, was not openly identified with either side in the struggle, and was doubtless willing to profit from both.

There had been rumors of horses being transported down the Raritan in flat boats by night, and the destination was said to be the quarters of the redcoats in New York, or the camps of the Hessians or British in New Jersey. That the reports were founded upon fact Reuben had no difficulty in believing, as he watched the men before him.

But what could he do? Prudence dictated that it would be wiser, as well as safer, for him, now that he was positive his presence was unknown, to withdraw silently from the place and return with all possible haste to his home.

If his father had returned from Bound Brook, as

without doubt he had by this time, then some of the neighbors might be quickly assembled, and they could come to the place where the horses were, and forcefully demand the restoration of their own. But such a course of action would require several hours, at best, for its completion, and meanwhile the men might drive their stolen possessions to the river and embark them all on the boat, which doubtless was somewhere waiting on the Raritan for their coming.

While Reuben hesitated he could hear the voices of the men in conversation and occasionally distinguish their words. The suggestion occurred to him that they might even now be talking over their plan of action, and suddenly he resolved to creep around to the side of the corral on which the men were standing, and endeavor to hear what they were saying.

The twilight had disappeared by this time, and the deepening dusk favored his project, so quitting his shelter, Reuben cautiously and slowly withdrew into the woods behind him. He stepped from tree to tree and frequently stopped to listen, but the deep silence was unbroken; and when at last he knew that he was far enough from the spot to enable him to move without fear of being overheard, he began to run swiftly, making a wide detour to enable him to approach again from the side on which the men had been standing.

Then, again, he became more cautious and stepped softly, fearful that some snapping branch or twig on

which, despite his efforts, he occasionally trod, would reveal his presence to the men of whom he naturally stood in great fear.

At last he could perceive the dim forms of the men before him, and soon as he dropped upon his knees and peered out from behind the shelter of the huge oak he had sought as his last and safest hiding-place, he was rejoiced to perceive that he could hear distinctly what was said by the men.

"I tell you, Steve," the stranger was saying, "it'll not do to wait any longer. You say this Philemon you saw was not alone, and before we know it they'll have the whole neighborhood after us."

"Yes, he wasn't alone," replied Stephen, "but 'twas only Reube Denton with him. He's nothing but a boy, and we needn't be afraid of him."

Reuben's cheeks flushed in the darkness as he heard the reference to himself, and despite his approving conscience, he had no difficulty in verifying the old adage that "listeners seldom hear any good of themselves." But his thoughts were all centred upon what the men were saying, and consequently he did not stop to muse over his own injured feelings.

"That's nothin' to do with it," the stranger retorted. "You say you saw the old man go back, but you didn't see the boy leave. He may be hereabouts now."

"No fear of that. I wish he would stay all night in the woods. 'Twould be better for us if he did."

"Pree-cisely. But the chances are ten to one that he went back with the old man, and before we know it, we'll have a hornet's nest stirred up."

"Well, what's to be done? I'd like to wait till to-morrow night, for we might get four or five more horses by that time, and that wouldn't add as much to our load as it would to our pockets."

"That's right enough, but my 'pinion is that we'd better clear out this very night and not take any more chances. We may lose all we've got, and get ourselves strung up by the neck into the bargain."

"Is the boat all ready?"

"Yes, I was there this afternoon, and Tom told me he'd be ready to put out on an hour's notice."

"Well, I reckon you'd better ride over and tell him that we'll be with him about midnight. But you'd better bring a couple o' men back with you to help manage the horses. It'll take considerable steering to get the whole twenty o' 'em down t' the river without some o' 'em breaking away or making a racket that'll call out all the men in the neighborhood."

"I'll go right away. I'll be back, Steve, by eleven o'clock at the latest."

The stranger instantly arose, and bridling one of the horses, at once departed from the place, passing, as he went, so near to the place where Reuben was concealed that the lad each moment expected that his presence would be discovered. However, the man was so evi-

dently intent upon his errand that he gave little heed to anything else, and soon disappeared from sight.

Meanwhile, Stephen Carle lighted his pipe, and seating himself on a board at the foot of a huge tree, leaned back, and calmly regarded the horses before him.

Reuben watched him with a fascination that was intense. Now he knew what the loss of the colts meant. They had not strayed from the pasture at all, but, without doubt, had been led away by the two thieves.

A sudden feeling of rage rose in his heart, and he was strongly tempted to step forth from his hiding-place and charge Stephen with his crime, and demand the return of the stolen property. In his anger he felt almost equal to the contest which might follow, but a brief reflection enabled him to perceive the folly of any such course. The man was stronger than he, and, besides, was armed and desperate. And yet, as he watched him, Reuben's feeling of anger became more intense with every passing moment. His very helplessness increased his rage. To lose the horses was bad enough of itself, but to know that their price when they were sold was to be received by thieves, and the beasts themselves turned over to the use of the redcoats, was adding insult to injury.

Meanwhile, Stephen Carle smoked on until his pipe burned out, and then his head began to nod, and Reuben could soon see that the man was asleep. Suddenly he

thought of a plan by which he might yet recover the horses. Glancing keenly at Stephen, and perceiving that he doubtless was asleep, he quietly arose, and swiftly and silently drew back among the trees. Once safely beyond the hearing of the man, he began to run, and once more circling the corral, he returned to the place where he had first approached it.

The fence itself was a very light affair, consisting only of saplings, placed singly upon stakes, driven at frequent intervals into the ground. To these saplings the horses had been tied, and all stood with their heads facing the outer part of the enclosure.

Passing quietly from one to another, the horses looking up in surprise or glancing curiously at the intruder, a few emitting a low whinny, much to Reuben's alarm, he began his search for his own colts. That they would recognize him he knew, for they were gentle, and had been petted by all the members of the Denton household. His main fear now was that they might be tied so near the sleeping Stephen that he might not be able to approach them without rousing him.

He passed cautiously nearly half-way around the enclosure, but his own horses had not been found. He dared not move any farther in that direction, for he must approach nearer than he dared to the sleeping man. So, carefully retracing his way, he began his search on the other side, and still the missing horses could not be found.

Almost in despair, and beginning to fear that they might already have been sent away, for he had no doubt that they had been taken by Stephen and his companion, he was about to abandon the search, when to his inexpressible delight he recognized both the missing colts. They were standing side by side, tied near the end of one of the saplings.

Evidently the colts were as rejoiced to see him as he was to discover them, for they both stretched forward their necks and responded to Reuben, as he gently rubbed their noses and patted them on their heads. Quickly he untied the rope halters, and then removing the rail from its place, led them both out of the enclosure.

Every moment was precious now, and with a fear that caused a strange choking sensation in his throat, Reuben stepped softly, the horses following obediently, and evidently glad to leave the place with their friend.

Suddenly Reuben stopped short, as the sound of a commotion among the horses he had left behind him came to him. In a moment he understood it all, and knew that the rail he had taken from its place had doubtless enabled some of the other horses to escape. Yes, he could hear them as they dashed here and there about the woods, but above the sound he could hear the exclamations and calls of Stephen Carle, now thoroughly awake, and running in pursuit of the escaping drove.

Quickly Reuben leaped upon the back of one of his colts, and holding the rope of the other's halter in his hand, spoke to them in a low voice, and began to ride swiftly through the forest.

The sounds of confusion behind him increased, and he urged his horse to greater speed. It was difficult for him to see far before him, and he had slight ideas of direction, his one purpose now being to escape from the region with all possible speed.

Even his eagerness was checked when he was almost thrown from his seat by the yank his companion horse gave him, for in the flight the two horses had passed on opposite sides of a small tree, and the rope was tightly held by it. Realizing instantly that he could not hope to escape through the woods in the darkness by attempting to ride one horse and lead the other, he let go his grasp on the halter, and decided that he must trust entirely to the instincts of the intelligent animal to follow him.

"Come, Topsy! Come on, Topsy!" he called, in a low voice, and to his delight he perceived that the other colt was following as he increased the speed of the one he was riding. On and on he rode, not knowing whether or not he was being pursued, trusting more to the instincts of his horse than to his own knowledge of his whereabouts, until with a sigh of relief, at last he perceived the dim outlines of the rough road before him, which led toward his father's house.

But his rejoicing was only for the moment, for as he turned into the road he suddenly discovered three men on horseback, riding swiftly and directly toward him, and even in the dim light he recognized one of them as the man who had recently been with Stephen Carle.

CHAPTER IV

THE RACE

IT was but the work of a moment for Reuben to wheel about, and giving one quick, low call to the other colt he dashed up the road with the horse he was riding, going at his utmost speed. He leaned low on the neck of the colt, almost expecting to hear the whistle of a bullet passing over his head, or that, worse still, he or his horse might be shot.

The loneliness of the spot and the character of the men whom he had so unexpectedly faced, combined to make the lad mindful of his peril, and no incentive was required to make him urge his horse to his best efforts. The trees and low shrubbery seemed to fly past him with the speed of the wind. The long leaps of the startled horse carried him swiftly away from the place where he had halted, but in a brief time he knew that he was pursued, though no shot had been fired.

The sounds of the horse's hoofs behind him could be distinctly heard, and the two or three sharp calls for him to stop only served to increase his fear and make him urge his horse to still greater efforts. The other colt he knew was now lost to him, but in the terror that

possessed him he gave it no heed, for his one purpose now was escape from his pursuer if possible, for he concluded from the sounds he heard that only one of the three men was following him.

For a time the pursuer seemed to be gaining upon him. The labored breathing of the horse and the sounds of the horseman behind him became almost monotonous. Reuben glanced backward at frequent intervals, but in the darkness he was not able to see the man or his horse, but the sounds of the pursuit were plainly audible.

On and on sped the horses and riders. The road was level and firm beneath the feet of his colt, despite the recent spring rains. His horse had now settled into a run, and was holding to his pace with greater strength than Reuben had dared expect, and if he could only hold out for another mile, he felt convinced that he might escape, for there was a fork in the road there and several houses, and he did not believe that his pursuer would care to incur the risk of meeting the men there, whom the lad was resolved to summon to his aid by shouting.

As he drew near, the fear that possessed Reuben was apparently shared by his horse, and no urging was required to keep him to the pace at which he was going. Whether he had been riding minutes or hours he could not determine, for his mind was held by the one strong desire to escape.

As he glanced up he beheld the three houses that were situated near the fork in the road, for which he had been eagerly looking. From behind he could still hear the sound of the footfalls of his pursuer's horse, but they seemed to be no nearer than they had been. Evidently the man was not now gaining upon him, and with a sigh of relief he pulled hard upon the rope of the halter of his horse, endeavoring to turn him into the short lane that led to the nearest of the three houses.

To his consternation he found that the horse paid no attention to his attempts to change the direction in which he was running. With neck bent and head held straight before him, the colt dashed forward and, do what he might, he was not able to make any impression upon him. The houses were near him, and the farm buildings, whitewashed like those of his father's, looked almost ghostlike in the dim light. The very silence that rested over them all served to increase his fear, and as he perceived that his only way of escape was to keep straight on in his course, he abandoned his effort to change the direction; but lifting his head for the moment, he shouted, in tones that must have penetrated even the log walls of the houses:—

“ Hallo! Hallo! Help! Help me! Hallo! Hallo! Help!”

Then, in a moment, his horse evidently frightened by the unexpected calls, he dashed past the place and was soon in the silence of the woods beyond.

For a time all his efforts were required to keep his place on the back of his plunging colt, but as soon as a measure of confidence had been restored to the terrified horse, he endeavored to listen again for the sounds of his pursuer. But nothing save the monotonous beats of the hoofs of the horse he was riding could be heard. Again and again he listened intently, but no other sound could he hear.

At last, convinced that his pursuer had abandoned his purpose or that he had outridden him in the last burst of speed his horse had made, he endeavored by gentle means to quiet the frightened animal. At length by gently pulling upon the halter and by speaking in low tones he managed to check his speed, and when at last the pace dropped from a run to a trot, and then to a walk, he slipped quickly from his place on the back, and holding the colt by the halter, he patted him softly and spoke soothing words, until at last the trembling beast became quiet and his snorts of fear ceased.

The poor animal was as wet as if he had fallen into the Raritan, and as Reuben led him within the shelter of the woods that grew close to the rough roadway, he took off his own coat and threw it over his back, while he waited for sounds that might indicate the passing of his pursuer, that is, if he was still being pursued.

After what he thought must be a half-hour had elapsed, confident that the pursuit had indeed been

abandoned, he once more led the horse out into the road and prepared to mount.

He had decided to return upon his course as far as the fork in the road he had recently passed, and then by taking the other road go back to the one that led to his father's house. This would enable him to avoid the place where he had met the men, and though the distance was somewhat greater, still he hoped to arrive at home before the light of the morning sun was seen.

The horse was evidently so nearly worn out by his mad race that Reuben permitted him to walk all the way, until once more he saw the three houses in the distance. As he approached, to his surprise he discovered the light of a burning candle in the lower room of one of the houses, and for a moment he was undecided what to do next. He knew the house well, for here dwelt Hannah Coddington, a girl of his own age and one of his friends who had attended the same church in Brunswick to which his own people had gone before the redcoats had come and church attendance had ceased.

While he was hesitating as to what to do, the door of the low house was opened, and in the doorway he recognized Hannah herself. In a moment he decided to stop and learn, if possible, whether or not she had heard anything of his pursuer. Accordingly he leaped from his horse's back, and leading the colt by the halter approached the house.

"Hannah, is that you?" he called, as he came nearer.

"Why, it's Reuben Denton!" exclaimed Hannah, as she perceived who the visitor was. "What in the world are you doing here, and at this time of the night?"

"I don't know. I hardly can tell, myself," replied Reuben, somehow strangely confused by the questions. "Is your father here? Maybe he is asleep and won't want me to disturb him. It must be almost morning."

"Almost morning! Why, it's not more than ten o'clock! What's happened to you, Reuben? Have you lost your wits? You look almost like Uncle Philemon out there. Come in. My father's in bed, but I'll tell him you want to see him. Just tie your horse to the hitching-post, and come right in."

"Wait a minute, till I tie him in the barn. He's all wet, and I don't want him to get cold. I'll be back in a minute."

When Reuben entered the house, after placing his horse in the barn, he found Mr. Coddington waiting for him, but somehow there was an air of constraint about him that at once impressed him, though he was not able to account for it.

"What brings you here at such a time?" said Mr. Coddington, nervously. "Are any of your people ill? Have you seen any one? Is there any news from Brunswick? I mean from Bound Brook?"

"We're all well at home; at least, they were this noon,

for I haven't been home since. As for Bound Brook, I'll know more about that when I go back, for my father and mother went over there this afternoon."

"Have you seen any one or heard anything? Is there any trouble?"

"Yes, there's trouble, and plenty of it."

"What is it? What do you mean? Where is it? Who is in trouble?" inquired the man, his nervousness becoming still more apparent.

"The horse thieves are at work again." And then Reuben told of his own experiences and the pursuit from which he had just escaped. "Did you see or hear anything of the man that chased me? He followed me as far as this, I know, but I think he gave it up when I got here. Did you hear me call you? I shouted and yelled when I went past here, but I couldn't stop my colt, for I didn't have anything but a halter on him."

"Yes, we heard you call, but we didn't know it was you. We heard some one going off down the road, and probably that was the man who was following you. You haven't heard or seen any one else, have you?"

"Not a soul."

"I'm glad of it," replied Mr. Coddington, with evident relief, though Reuben could not account for the change in him. "Now what shall you do?"

"I'm going straight home and report. I stopped only to find out whether you'd seen anything of the man that followed me or not. My father will want to do some-

thing right away about the horses, I know, for Steve Carle will be gone if they don't look out, and all the horses, too."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Coddington, quietly ; "all the neighbors must bear a hand in a time like this. We shan't have anything left on our places if this keeps up much longer."

"Then we'd better start at once," said Reuben.

"I'll saddle your horse for you, father," said Hannah, quickly. "You get yourself ready to go, and Reuben and I'll have the horses in no time."

Accordingly, Hannah went with Reuben, and in a brief time they returned to the house and stood waiting in front of the kitchen door.

"Reuben," said Hannah in a low voice, "are you going with your brothers?"

"Going where?"

"To join the soldiers."

"I don't know. I'd like to go, but my father doesn't want me to."

"He ought to want you!" said the girl, decidedly. "Every man ought to go. I'd go if I was a man! I wouldn't wait a minute! I wonder why my father doesn't come! Here, Reuben, you hold my horse, and I'll tell him we're ready."

"I'll tell him," replied Reuben, quickly; and before Hannah could protest he had thrust the halter of his own horse into her hand and ran quickly to the door.

As he stepped inside, he started back in confusion, for there, directly before him, was a man in the uniform of the British army. Before Reuben could speak, the soldier quickly slipped back, opened the other door, and disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER V

A FRUITLESS QUEST

FOR a moment Reuben stood motionless, so astounded was he by the sight of the British soldier. So well known were the sentiments of Mr. Coddington, and so firm had been his devotion to the cause of the colonies, that the presence of one of the soldiers of the king in his home was to Reuben not only strange but almost unaccountable. The nervousness of Mr. Coddington's manner and the many abrupt questions he had asked also recurred to the troubled lad, and for a time it seemed as if no explanation could be made for the sight he had just seen.

"If you are ready, we'll start at once," said Mr. Coddington.

Reuben made no response as he turned and approached the horses. So completely was he engrossed with the perplexing problem, that he did not appear to notice Hannah, who remained standing near the doorway after the men had mounted the horses and were prepared to set forth on their ride.

"Aren't you going to say good night, Reuben?" inquired the girl.

"Yes, yes, good night! good night, Hannah," Reuben responded absently, and in a moment he and his companion had turned down the lane that led to the road.

"Mr. Coddington, are you going to leave Hannah there alone with that man?" inquired Reuben, abruptly.

"Yes, yes. She will be safe enough. The younger children are there, and ever since her mother's death, two years ago, Hannah has been accustomed to look out for herself. She will be safe; I have no fears."

"But—" began Reuben again, and then he paused abruptly. The words that he wanted to say failed him, and his perplexity increased.

"Reuben, lad," said Mr. Coddington, at last, after they had ridden on in silence for a time, "I think you are a trusty fellow."

Reuben did not feel called upon to make any response, and the silence was unbroken for several minutes, as they rode swiftly forward in the darkness.

"I always felt that I could depend upon you," said Mr. Coddington again, as if he was giving utterance to something that he has been thinking seriously about. "No lad along the Raritan has a better name than you for sense." Still Reuben did not respond, although he was almost as much perplexed now by his companion's words as he had been a few moments before by the unexpected sight he had seen in his house.

"You saw the man in my house?" inquired Mr.

Coddington, abruptly. "I have no need to ask that question, for I know you saw him."

"Yes, sir, I saw him."

"Did you recognize him? Do you know who he is?"

"He is a redcoat," replied Reuben, sharply.

"And therefore to be hated?"

"I have no love for King George's men or for the Dutch butchers."

"Does wearing a scarlet uniform always mean that a man is an enemy of the colonies?"

"It ought to!" replied Reuben, sharply. "I may hate a man who wears it, but I should just despise a man who wore it without meaning it. A soldier is one thing, but a sneak is another, and to my mind a good deal worse."

Mr. Coddington did not immediately reply, for Reuben had spoken with all the warmth of his young heart, and it was evident that he had no desire to hear more concerning the strange soldier they had left behind them.

"I said a little while ago that you were a trusty lad, Reuben," said Mr. Coddington, again breaking in upon the silence. "I meant all that I said."

The lad made no response, though his companion might have seen, if the darkness had not hidden his face, that Reuben's cheeks had flushed angrily at the words. It seemed to him that the man beside him, whom he had always respected, was engaged in an attempt to bribe him to silence by the means of his vain praises and empty compliments.

"Do you remember my wife?" inquired Mr. Coddington.

"Yes, sir. She was a good woman."

"She was, she was, indeed. Life has never been the same to me since she left me, though Hannah has been as good a daughter to me as ever an unworthy man had. Did you ever know any of Sarah's—Sarah was my wife, you know—did you ever know any of her family?"

"No. Of course I knew you and Hannah and the children, but no one else."

"That man you saw in my house just now was my wife's brother."

"Oh," responded Reuben, quickly, "and he came to see you? I understand now. I thought it strange that you should have a redcoat soldier in your house, but I see now." Reuben spoke so earnestly that a smile crept over his companion's face, though the darkness hid it from sight.

"Yes, he is my wife's brother."

"And is he a Tory? Of course, he must be if he wears the uniform of the regulars. But 'twas natural for him to want to see you and his sister's children."

"Yes, 'twas natural." Mr. Coddington hesitated, and apparently was on the point of adding something to his words, but thinking better of his purpose he simply said, "Reuben, do you think it would be asking too much of you to beg you to be silent concerning his presence in the house?"

"Why, no, sir; I'll not say anything about it," assented Reuben, readily.

"Not even to your father or mother?"

"I'll not tell them if you don't want me to."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, and so will Abraham Patten be, too."

"Abraham Patten? Who is he?"

"My wife's brother."

"Oh, that's his name, is it?"

"Yes. I'm doubly grateful to you for your promise, as I said before. Some day I may be able to explain to you more fully than I can now why it is that I am so anxious in this matter; but for the present I shall rest content on the promise you have given me. And you'll not refer to him, even to your own parents?" inquired Mr. Coddington again, eagerly.

"I gave you my word," said Reuben, somewhat offended by the apparent lack of confidence his companion displayed.

"So you did; so you did. But you cannot know how anxious I am! Forgive me, lad, for seeming to doubt your word. I know I can trust you; I know I can, and there's my hand, to show you that I believe every word you say."

As he spoke, Mr. Coddington held forth his hand, and Reuben grasped it for a moment, puzzled by the anxiety of the man, and made still more uneasy as he felt the fingers trembling in his own. Evidently there

was more in the story than he had yet heard, as Mr. Coddington had intimated; but, content with the meagre explanation that had been given him, he asked no further questions, and the two men rode forward in silence through the remainder of their journey. No one molested them on the way, nor was any one seen by them. The little houses they passed on the road were wrapped in darkness, and the only sounds that could be heard were the occasional barking of dogs, roused by the unusual experience of hearing horsemen pass the lonely farms in the dead of night.

It was after twelve o'clock when at last they halted before Reuben's home, but the light of a candle gleaming through the kitchen windows showed that not all of the family had retired for the night. The lad needed no one to inform him that his own absence was the cause of the unusual light in the house.

Tossing the rope of his halter to his companion, Reuben hastily leaped from the back of his horse, and running quickly to the door, flung it open and entered. Both his father and mother were in the room, and at his coming his mother uttered a glad exclamation and, flung her arms about his neck.

"We were so anxious about you, my son," she exclaimed, her face shining as she spoke. "You are not harmed? You have not been hurt?" she inquired, eagerly.

"No, no; I'm as well as ever I was."

"Tell us, Reuben, where you have been," said his father, sternly. "Philemon was here soon after sundown, and said your search was a failure. Why did you not come directly home? You have given me and your mother a most unhappy evening."

"I was looking for the horses."

"And did not find them? You should have come back at once."

"I found them," said Reuben, quietly.

"You did! You found them?" exclaimed his father. "Where are they? Ah, I see, you have them both," he added, as he glanced into the yard.

"I found them, but I have only one. The other is Mr. Coddington's, and he is here, too. Shall I ask him to come in?"

"You should have done that before," said his mother, reproachfully.

In a moment Mr. Coddington had tied both horses, and entered the house in response to Mrs. Denton's words, for she had followed Reuben into the yard; and then the story of the adventure of the night was quickly told, though no reference was made to the scarlet-clad soldier whom Reuben had seen in Mr. Coddington's house.

"What is to be done? What shall we do?" inquired Mr. Denton, almost peevishly, when at last the story had all been told.

"Do?" said Mr. Coddington, sternly. "There's only one thing to be done. We must go at once to the

place where Reuben found the horses. It may be too late, even now."

"Will it be safe for us three to go alone?"

"It will be safe for us to start. Have Cato and Cæsar go, too, and we may be able to get three or four men besides; but whether we do or not, we must start anyway and at once."

While Mr. Denton went to summon the two negroes, Reuben took Mr. Coddington's horse and rode swiftly to their nearest neighbor's, and when he returned, Mr. Goodnow and his son Jacob, a lad of Reuben's age, were with him. The party of seven was then speedily organized; and all of them armed, they set forth on their quest through the woods.

The loss of horses and cattle was becoming so common, and the anger of the people against the thieves — the lawless men who were quick to turn the troubrous times to their own advantage — was so great that every one knew short work would be made of Stephen Carle and his confederates if they should once be taken. The present problem, however, consisted of the recovery of the stolen horses and the capture of the men, and intent upon their serious labors the little band moved swiftly and silently through the forest. Both Cato and Cæsar had rude lanterns, but these were not lighted, being held for emergencies that might arise later.

All the men were experienced woodmen, and though the woods were dark, they had no difficulty in mak-

ing their way among the trees. They seldom spoke, and when they did, it was in whispers, when they occasionally stopped to get their bearings or to make certain that their movements were not observed by others.

The men before them were desperate, and rather than submit to being taken or suffer the vengeance of the angry Jersey farmers, would make a desperate effort to escape. The serious nature of the undertaking was sufficient of itself to make every one cautious, and when at last Reuben, who was leading the way, halted, and in a whisper explained that they were near to the place he was seeking, the excitement, though suppressed, became intense.

"Stay here, and let me creep up to the corral," whispered Reuben. "If I call, or you hear a shot, run for the place ahead there," and he pointed toward an opening in the woods before him, where the light was somewhat more apparent.

Then leaving the men behind him, Reuben crept cautiously and slowly forward. After every few steps he would stop and listen attentively for the sound of voices or peer intently into the gloom before him. Not a sound as yet had been heard, nor had anything been seen that could imply the presence of peril.

On and on Reuben moved steadily, until at last he saw, not more than a yard before him, the rude fence to which the horses had been tied, but not a living

creature was near him. Cautiously he followed the rail until he had completed the circuit, but evidently the place was abandoned, and neither men nor horses were there.

Quickly then he retraced his way to his companions and reported his discovery, and the entire party at once advanced and joined in the search. The lanterns were lighted, but they only served to reveal the places where the horses had stood, and that was all. It was evident the thieves had departed and had taken their booty with them.

"It was as I feared," said Mr. Coddington, at last. "The men were frightened by Reuben's coming and have gone. Doubtless by this time they are well on their way down the Raritan. We might as well go home."

Accordingly the entire party returned to Mr. Denton's home, and as they entered the yard the beams of the rising sun came creeping up above the tops of the trees in the woods that lay to the east of the farm. Reuben led forth Mr. Coddington's horse for him, and as the man mounted and prepared to depart, he leaned low on his horse's neck and said to Reuben, "You'll remember your promise, lad?"

Reuben, angry at the apparent lack of confidence, nodded his head, and then, as Mr. Coddington rode away, turned back to the barn to assist Cato in the morning chores.

As he approached the barn-door he was startled to behold the negro running toward him, his eyes wild with excitement and fear, and his hands trembling as with an ague. "What's the trouble, Cato? What's wrong?" inquired Reuben, quickly.

Without replying Cato seized Reuben by the arm and drew him toward the barn. As they entered, his eyes rolling and his teeth chattering, the black pointed toward a spot in the low haymow. There, protruding from the hay, Reuben perceived the huge foot of a man, and in a moment he was as greatly excited as was the trembling Cato by his side.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE CAMP

THE hay in the mow was nearly on a level with the main floor of the barn, for the long winter had reduced the supply, so that only a scanty store remained. The man who had striven to conceal himself evidently had found some difficulty in entirely covering himself with the hay, though doubtless from the fact that only the one foot was exposed, he now believed that he was completely hidden from sight.

At another time Reuben might have been tempted to laugh at the ludicrous sight, but now the intense excitement of the night just gone, as well as the anger in his heart over the loss of one of the horses, made him of another and entirely different mind. He glanced hastily about him for some weapon, but the only object in sight was a rude pitchfork, which he at once took in his hands. Hanging upon a peg above the place where the pitchfork had been placed was a long leather strap. The sight of it instantly suggested a plan, which he quickly put into execution. Taking the strap he made a noose in one end, which he placed over the exposed foot, and

then with a gesture of warning placed the strap itself in the hands of Cato.

All this had taken but a moment, and as soon as the black had taken his stand where Reuben directed him, the lad himself, with his pitchfork in his hands and ready for any sudden outbreak on the part of the stranger, spoke to the concealed man.

"Come out of that! Whoever you are, come out of that hay!"

There was no response, nor did the man change his position in the least.

"Come out of that, I tell you!" called Reuben, still more sharply.

Again there was a silence, and no reply to the summons was made. Bestowing upon the exposed foot a slight kick, Reuben said once more, "You're the man I mean. Come out of that hay before I use my pitchfork! You'd better come, for one of the tines might accidentally prick you!"

Still no movement on the part of the man was made, and for a moment Reuben was nonplussed. Was the man dead? What was the meaning of his continued refusal to heed the call that had been made for him to come forth? Could it be that he was asleep and had not heard him?

He grasped his pitchfork more tightly and was about to advance and carefully remove the hay, when suddenly there was a quick movement beneath him, the hay was

tossed aside, and the man sprang up and darted toward the open door. So unexpected had been the movement, and so startled were both Reuben and Cato by the action, that the man had almost gained the door before Reuben recovered himself sufficiently to call to his companion. "Pull on your strap, Cato! Yank him! Trip him up!"

Cato instantly responded and gave the strap in his hands such a tug that the man's foot was drawn quickly backward, and he fell forward on his face. Hastily rising to his feet again, the man with a low exclamation of rage started for Reuben. The lad had hardly time to draw back the pitchfork before the man was upon him.

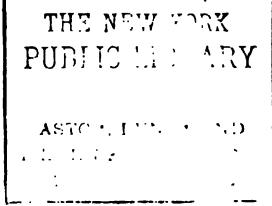
"Pull your strap! Trip him up again, Cato!" shouted Reuben.

The negro again obeyed, and just as the man's hands were stretched forth to seize Reuben the strap tightened, and his feet were drawn from beneath him so quickly that once more he fell with a thud upon the floor, that betokened the force with which Cato had drawn back the strap.

This time, and before an opportunity was given the man to recover himself, Reuben dropped his pitchfork and threw himself upon the prostrate form, at the same time calling loudly upon Cato to come to his aid. Perceiving the purpose of his young master, the black man dropped upon the feet and legs of the stranger, and immediately a struggle followed that taxed the powers of all three to their utmost. Over and over upon the floor



"REUBEN DROPPED HIS PITCHFORK AND THREW HIMSELF UPON THE
PROSTRATE FORM."



of the barn rolled the three men, the stranger endeavoring to throw off the grasp of his captors, and Reuben and Cato holding on as for life itself.

Kicking, striking, biting, cursing, the man desperately strove to free himself.

He was a powerful man. Both Reuben and Cato speedily had ample evidence of that fact, but he had been taken at a disadvantage, and both men were holding to him tenaciously.

At last Cato managed to hold the legs of the struggling man beneath his own body, and Reuben had succeeded in getting one of the arms beneath his knees, while with both hands he held the other fast. The man now knew himself to be a prisoner, and his struggles ceased.

Peering over the head into the prostrate face before him, Reuben uttered a low exclamation, as he recognized the man as Stephen Carle himself. A half-savage smile flitted across the face of the horse thief as he perceived that he was known, and he said quietly :—

“ Well, you’ve got me this time.”

“ That’s what we have,” responded Reuben.

“ What are you going to do with me ? ”

“ We’ll see about that after — ”

With a sudden and desperate effort the man made one more attempt to shake off his captors. He writhed and twisted upon the floor, the veins swelled out upon his forehead, his face betrayed the supreme exertion he

was making. For a moment one foot became free, and he bestowed such a resounding kick upon Cato's woolly head, that it seemed to Reuben as if the skull of the black man must have been broken; but instantly Cato's hands regained their hold, and in a brief time the man's efforts ceased, and once more he was quiet in their grasp.

"Yes, you've got me, I reckon," said Stephen Carle again. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Keep you."

"I reckon you'll have to. Why don't you send Cato for some one to come and get me? Seems to me as if I had you, about as much as you have me."

"Cato," said Reuben, "I'm going to call father. You yell with me."

"Ho, there! Father! Father! Come out to the barn!" shouted Reuben, and Cato's voice joined in until it seemed as if their call must be heard.

It was repeated twice, however, before the response was heard, and then in a brief time Mr. Denton came running toward the barn, his wife following with all haste.

"What? What's the meaning of this? What, what are you doing, Reuben?" exclaimed his father, in astonishment, as he stopped in the open doorway and gazed at the prostrate men before him.

"We've got Stephen Carle here. We've got the horse thief."

"What! Are you sure? Are you sure?" said Mr. Denton, as he advanced and peered down into the face of the man. "Yes, you're right. 'Tis the very man!" he exclaimed. "Oh, you villain! you robber!" he added, as he shook his fist in his excitement.

"Get the strap and tie his hands," said Reuben, quickly. "We shan't be able to hold on to him much longer."

If Reuben's mother had not entered the barn at this time and, quickly comprehending the situation, at once aided her husband in securely tying the hands which Reuben held, perhaps Carle might have escaped despite them all, for Mr. Denton was so excited that his hands shook, and he seemed to be nearly bereft of the power to act; but, as it was, the prisoner was rolled over upon his face, his arms were tightly bound behind him, and then he was bidden to stand up.

By the assistance of Cato he was enabled to respond, and stood before the assembly, looking indifferently from one to another, as if his capture, after all, was a matter of supreme indifference to him.

"Where are the horses, Stephen Carle?" demanded Mr. Denton, sharply.

"What horses?"

"The horses you stole. The horses Reuben saw in the woods last night."

For an instant the prisoner glanced at Reuben, before he replied, and then he said quietly, "They're

in New York by this time, or if they're not, they're well on their way."

"Oh, you rascal, you — you — you — " began Mr. Denton, in his increasing excitement.

"Come, father," interrupted Mrs. Denton, soothingly. "We'll take him into the house and see about what shall be done afterward."

Her advice was at once acted upon, and the entire party went to the house, where the prisoner, with his arms still bound behind him, was secured in one of the less frequently used rooms, and the others then went to the kitchen, where in a few minutes their breakfast was prepared for them. What was to be done with the prisoner was the problem which now presented itself, but after a consultation it was decided that the best solution would be for Reuben and Jacob Goodnow to take him to Bound Brook and turn him over to the military authorities there.

Accordingly, late in the afternoon (for Mrs. Denton insisted that Reuben, after the stirring events of the night, should be permitted to sleep until the noon hour came) Reuben and Jacob started for the nearest quarters of the army. What was likely to be the fate of the prisoner all knew, for there was slight mercy in those days for the man who dared to rob his neighbors of horses or cattle. At first it had been thought best for the boys to go on horseback (the Goodnows still had several horses left upon their farm) but it was decided

that they would be less likely to attract attention if they should walk, and as the distance was only a few miles, they would be able to return early in the night.

It was scarcely dusk when the boys came near to the camp of the American soldiers; and when to the sentry they explained the object of their coming, they were speedily conducted to the commander's quarters, where their prisoner was at once turned over to the authorities. Then, permission having been obtained, Reuben sought out his two brothers and, with Jacob by his side, soon was standing before the hut they occupied.

Some tents were to be seen in the camp, but for the most part the quarters held by the soldiers were log houses. These houses had been built of the trunks of trees cut into suitable lengths and dovetailed at their extremities. The spaces between the logs had been filled in with clay, and the timbers of the roofs covered with hewn slabs. The chimney, also of timber, was situated in one end of the hut, and that also had been completely covered with clay to protect it from fire. Doors and windows were formed by sawing away a part of the logs of proper size, and were made to move on wooden hinges. Nails in the camp were almost unknown, and the axe and the saw were almost the only implements to be had. The huts occupied by the soldiers were arranged in parallel straight lines, and presented the appearance of a compact little village.

The quarters of the officers were similar to those

occupied by the men, though they had kitchens in the rear and were situated in front of the other huts. In front of the lines of huts the trees had been felled and the ground cleared for a considerable space for a parade ground. Stumps and all rubbish had been removed, and as the ground was swept every morning, it presented a reasonably neat appearance in the time of the roll-calls and parades.

The soldiers themselves belonged to the militia for the most part, and as a rule were mostly boys or young men. Some had uniforms, some had none, while others were "Jersey Blues," by which term the young men who had been supplied by admiring friends (women) with tow frocks and trousers dyed blue, were styled. Still these last were by no means proud of their appearance, and certainly were no objects of envy among their fellows, as to-day we can easily understand.

The novelty of the camp life, and the descriptions given by "Bob" and "Phil" Denton, were thoroughly enjoyed by Reuben and Jacob, and most of all were they impressed by the reports that were current in the camp, that some movements of importance, and in the immediate vicinity, were being contemplated by both the British and the American leaders, though what or when these were to be no one could explain. The very vagueness of the rumors, however, increased the interest of the boys, and when at last they departed from the camp for their homes, they were filled with the martial

spirit, and firmly believed that stirring events were to be expected soon ; and there was also the feeling that they, too, might have a share in them.

The sun had set and the darkness had come before they had set forth from the camp, but as they trudged onward through the woods along the rough roadway, their thoughts were far more of the scenes they had left than of any possible perils in their journey home.

Suddenly Jacob grasped his friend by the arm and in a loud whisper exclaimed, " What's that ? "

Startled, Reuben halted and listened intently, as a low rumble was heard from the road in front of them. The noise became more distinct, and soon the dim outlines of the forms of many men could be seen advancing. Hastily Reuben and Jacob drew back behind the near-by trees and, almost breathless with excitement, watched in silence until the band, in which they concluded were at least a hundred and fifty men, marched swiftly and silently past them.

CHAPTER VII

THE MARCH IN THE NIGHT

CONVINCED that the force had gone, Reuben and Jacob stepped forth from their hiding-place and for a moment stared blankly at each other.

"What do you suppose that was?" said Jacob, at last, in a low whisper.

"That' was a band of regulars from Brunswick," replied Reuben, in a voice that showed that he was as strongly excited as his companion.

"Yes, I know. But what are they going to do? Where are they going?"

"Bound Brook, probably."

"Do you really believe that? Why, they didn't have half as many men as we have there. They never would dare attack such a force!"

"They're going to, and we must do something and do it right away. Here we stand and jabber away like blackbirds when we ought to be half-way there ourselves. We can run across lots and get there before them. Come on, Jake! Come on!"

Jacob made no protest and began to follow Reuben,

who had already left the road and was running swiftly through the woods. His object was to gain the front of the band of regulars and, by running swiftly, arrive at the quarters of the militia in time to give the men warning of the coming of the redcoats.

Both boys were excellent runners, and in the excitement under which they were laboring they hoped to be able to accomplish the desired result. Even a brief time would enable the militia to form, and in a measure be prepared to resist the attack which somehow seemed to Reuben certain to be made. He was thinking of his own brothers, and the peril of Bob and Phil would of itself have provided a strong incentive had there been no other motive in his heart.

The boys gained the summit of the low hill near by and then plunged down its side, leaping over the fallen trees and rushing through the noisy waters of a brook that flowed through the valley, and in a brief time came out into the road that turned to the right, a branch of the main road that led to Bound Brook.

For a moment they paused for breath and to look about them. There was a sighing among the branches of the tall trees, but above the sound could be heard the noise made by an approaching body of men.

"Reuben, Reuben, what is that?" whispered Jacob, excitedly, as he grasped his friend's arm and stood peering down the road, listening intently.

"Come on!" was the only reply Reuben made as he

pulled Jacob with him into the shelter of the woods by the roadside.

Trembling under the renewed excitement, the boys watched in the dim light for the coming of the men, and in a brief time the band marched past them. They moved in perfect order, not a word being spoken, and the only sound to be heard was the rhythmical tread of the many feet. Before the boys could fully realize that the band was passing it was gone, and the sombre silence of the great forest was once more unbroken.

With a sigh of relief, Reuben said : "They're not going to Bound Brook, after all. I wonder where they have started for ? "

"Do you think 'twas the same company we saw back yonder ? " inquired Jacob.

"Yes, I know it was. We shan't have to go to Bound Brook anyway, but I wish I knew what they were going to do."

"We can't tell. We might as well go back home now. We'll hear all about it to-morrow if it amounts to anything. I don't believe it's anything more than a foraging party, anyway. We've had our trouble for our pains."

Jacob was tired, for the walk had been a long one, and the recent swift pace at which they had been running had increased his feeling of weariness.

"Come on, then," responded Reuben, sturdily, as he

stepped forth from among the trees and began to walk rapidly down the road.

Jacob followed obediently, and for a time neither boy spoke, though both were plainly anxious and frequently stopped and listened or peered intently before them into the dark roadway. The day and the night had been filled with excitement, and the effect was still strong upon them.

Besides, the startling and unexpected appearance of the band of redcoats, now twice seen by them, increased their nervous dread, for despite the fact that the regulars had left the road that led to Bound Brook, Reuben was still by no means certain that that was not to be their destination, and again and again he hesitated, almost persuaded that he ought to return to the camp and carry the information of the presence of the enemy, leaving the action to be taken with those who were responsible.

On the other hand, there was the anxiety in his own home which his prolonged absence would increase, and striving resolutely to make himself believe that his proper course under the circumstances was to return, he held to his way, and for a half-hour the boys made most excellent time as they trudged on over the rough roadway.

They had now come to a long, covered bridge, that spanned the brook they had recently waded through. Here the bed of the stream was wide, and the bridge itself not less than sixty feet in length. It was a forbidding looking sight, for as they approached, the dark-

ness within the rude structure was rendered even more intense by the faint light which could be seen at the farther and opposite end.

Almost unconsciously the pace of the boys slackened and, though neither spoke, their footfalls were almost noiseless now, as they carefully and cautiously stepped on the loose planks that had been placed across the stringers. It was a spot of which strange tales had been told long before the breaking out of the war, and the children of the region were all familiar with the reports of the uncanny deeds which had been committed there.

The bridge had been well-nigh crossed, and with a sigh of relief Reuben and Jacob were about to approach what, in comparison with the darkness within the structure, seemed to be almost like the light of day, when to their alarm a man stepped forth from behind the timbers of the bridge and, quickly bringing his gun to his shoulder, said:—

“Stop! Stop right where you are!”

The boys were within a yard of the exit, and the outlines of the man before them could be distinctly seen. His words and, above all, his action plainly indicated that he was in earnest, and instantly the boys obeyed. Reuben could hear the heavy breathing of Jacob, which sounded very like a sob, and he, too, for his own part, was badly frightened.

“Who are you?” demanded the man, sharply.

"Reuben Denton and Jacob Goodnow," responded Reuben, simply.

"Come a little farther into the light and let me see if you speak truly," said the man, and it seemed to Reuben as if he could detect a marked change in the tone of his voice, as he spoke.

There was nothing to be done except to obey, and the boys both advanced into the clearer light. As Reuben glanced keenly at the man he gave a sudden start, for it was Abraham Patten who stood before them. He was not now clad in the scarlet uniform of the British, for he wore the garb of the ordinary farmer, but there was no mistaking the man. It was indeed Hannah Coddington's uncle, whom he had seen the preceding night in her house. Whether or not he himself was recognized he could not determine, but he had given his name, and doubtless the man would know him.

After glancing keenly into the faces of the boys, the man lowered his gun and said: "Yes, I see you are what you say you are. But what are you doing here? Where have you been?"

"To Bound Brook."

"What for?"

Reuben felt inclined to dispute the right of the man to question them. Who was he, that he should stop them at the muzzle of his gun and demand that they should give an account of themselves to him? He

recalled the appearance of this man as he had seen him in Mr. Coddington's house, and the evident anxiety of Mr. Coddington himself concerning him also came to his mind.

There was something very strange in it all, and the fact that the man was now clad in a farmer's garb also was unexplainable. However, he hastily concluded that the simpler way was the better one, for the present, at least, and so he replied :—

"We took Stephen Carle, the horse thief, over there."

"Did you get Steve?" inquired the man, eagerly.

"Yes. Mr. Coddington might have told you if you had stayed in his house till this morning. He knew all about it, for he was at our house last night."

"Yes, yes," said the man, in some confusion. "I doubt not. I doubt not. And yet I did not know. But what makes you so late in returning?"

"We've been watching some of your redcoats back here."

"My ' redcoats? I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"You were a redcoat yourself last night. I supposed you belonged to them," replied Reuben, sharply; for the increasing uneasiness of the man had made him correspondingly more bold.

"What were the redcoats doing? Where did you see them? Where were they going?" inquired Abra-

ham Patten, eagerly, as if he had not heard Reuben's words.

"You know better than I."

"I? I know nothing of them."

"Well, we thought they were headed for Bound Brook, but they turned to the right back here and took the road for Quibbletown. They may be going there, for all that I know about it."

"I'm sorry I stopped you, boys," said Abraham Patten, quietly, "I took you for some one else. I meant no harm by it."

"Then we'll go on home if you have no objection," said Reuben, sharply, for now that the danger was past, his anger was beginning to rise.

"It will not be necessary for you to say to any one that you met me."

"No, it won't be necessary."

"And you'll not refer to it?"

"I didn't say so."

"Then I'll say it for you. I know I can depend upon your promise."

The man spoke sternly now, and Reuben's fears returned. The mystery connected with him, the evident anxiety of Mr. Coddington that he should be silent, and the stern words of the man himself, all had their effect; but the promise Reuben had given the preceding night not to refer to what he had seen, recurred to him now, and after a brief hesitation he said:—

"You know best, you and Mr. Coddington, why you want us to keep silence; but as I've already promised him, I don't mind telling you that I'll stick to my word."

"Thank you! Good night!" and before the boys fully realized that he was gone, Abraham Patten had entered the dark, covered passage and disappeared from sight.

Puzzled far more than he cared to express, Reuben said but a few words to Jacob as they resumed their journey, but it was agreed by them both that neither would make any reference to their friends to the strange meeting with Abraham Patten at the covered bridge.

An hour later Reuben turned into the lane that led to his father's house, and Jacob, bidding him good night, passed on to his own home. No mention was made of the meeting with Abraham Patten in the report Reuben gave of his journey, and in the satisfaction that was expressed over the safe delivery of Stephen Carle, and the uneasiness manifest over the march of the band of redcoats, the omission was almost ignored by Reuben himself.

Early in the following morning, when the family was seated at the breakfast table, glancing out of the window Reuben perceived Uncle Philemon approaching. "Here comes Uncle Philemon," he exclaimed, as he opened the door and welcomed the old man. "Come right in and have a seat with us."

The old man responded cheerfully and, accepting the chair, seated himself at Reuben's right, first muttering to himself a few mystic words.

"They had a fight over by Quibbletown last night," he remarked.

"Tell us about it! Who won? Were any hurt?" exclaimed Reuben, eagerly.

Perceiving that all were eager to hear him, Uncle Philemon, with provoking slowness, told his story. "The redcoats, no Hessians this time, no Dutch butchers this night, went over last night to Quibbletown."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Reuben, eagerly.

"Well, they met about a hundred and fifty of our soldiers there. Our men were in the open field and the redcoats in the woods."

"But what happened?"

"They broke the rifles of two of our men."

"Is that all?"

"No, they marched back to Brunswick."

"And no one was harmed?" inquired Mrs. Denton.

"'Tis said not a man was shot."

"Then the attack failed?" said Mrs. Denton.

"It failed. But the war will succeed. This is the year when we shall win our independence."

"How do you know?" inquired Reuben, innocently.

"'Tis as plain as daylight. The year 1777 has three sevens in it, hasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, but what of that?"

"Seven is a complete number. Three sevens make it doubly sure. We win this year."

The family laughed, but Uncle Philemon was calm and unmoved in his confidence.

"Reuben," he said, after breakfast, "come out to the barn with me, I've a great secret to tell you. It's a wonderful piece of news I have to give you."

Puzzled by the actions of the old man and wondering what the important information he had to impart might be, Reuben followed him as he led the way to the barn; but as soon as Uncle Philemon began to speak, he quickly perceived that the importance of his discovery had not been exaggerated, though the interpretation the superstitious man gave of it was far different from Reuben's own.

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE PHILEMON'S GHOSTS

"**I'**VE found a place that's haunted, Reuben," was the first remark Uncle Philemon made.

The old man was so solemn in his manner and so profoundly convinced of the truth of his assertion, that Reuben laughed aloud. He knew so well the childish confidence of Uncle Philemon in ghosts and various other uncanny visitors from the unseen world, that he was not surprised at the statement, but the ludicrous nature of the whole thing impressed him afresh, and his hearty laugh only served to anger his visitor.

"Laugh if ye want to!" said Uncle Philemon, sharply. "That's always the way with children and fools! They only say 'te he, te he,' when their elders and betters would more likely say their prayers."

It was Reuben's turn now to be angry, for he by no means relished the class to which the indignant old man consigned him. His laughter ceased abruptly as he said, "Where's the place, Uncle Philemon? How did you find it?"

"The place is the old covered bridge 'twixt here and Bound Brook—that's where it is; but 'tis neither here

nor there how I found it out. 'Tis enough that I know what I'm talkin' about."

"The old covered bridge!" exclaimed Reuben, thoughtfully. He was thinking of the meeting which he and Jacob had had there the preceding night with Abraham Patten. Perhaps Uncle Philemon had had an equally strange experience there, too. His manner instantly changed, and he was keenly attentive.

"Yes, the old covered bridge," resumed Uncle Philemon, evidently impressed by the sudden change in Reuben's manner. "That's a good place for one, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Tell me about it."

"Well, I was there last night, just after sundown, and I see at one end of the bridge, just as I was comin' in at the other, a strange sight. 'Twas just like a man, and yet I knew 'twasn't a man, because it was up in the air 'bout half-way 'twixt the ground and the roof. I was scared when I saw it, and maybe I called out, I don't just remember 'bout that, but prob'ly I did. Well, the figure stopped right there in the air for a minute and then went right up through the roof. Yes, sir, it went right up through the roof, and was out of sight in no time."

"What did you do?"

"Well, I started to turn back, for I hadn't any very great desire to meet the thing, but all at once there was the most dreadful groaning you ever heard. The

old bridge was just full of it. At first I thought it came from the ground, and then I thought it came from the sky. I knew it came from in front of me, and I started to turn back, and then it sounded right behind me, and I knew I couldn't get away in that direction."

"But what did you do?" repeated Reuben, as the old man paused for a moment.

"Well, I suspect I lit out. At any rate, when I came to myself I was 'way this side o' the bridge, but the minute I stopped I could hear that terrible groaning back there in the bridge. It sounded like a hundred men dying back there. The road was shaking where I stood, but I didn't wait to find out anything more. It seemed to me they were calling me to come back. 'Phi-lee-mon!' 'Phi-i-le-e-e-mon!' they kept a-calling till I was out o' sound and hearing. Now what do you think of that?"

"I think it's very strange," replied Reuben. "Are you sure there was only one man you saw?"

"It wasn't any '*man*' I saw there, I'm tellin' ye! 'Twasn't anything mortal I see! If I was to judge by my eyes, I might think 'twas only one, but judging by my ears, 'twas like an army with banners."

"Have you told any one about it?"

"Not a soul, except you."

"Then don't tell any one else about it; we must look into it."

"I don't know whether we'd better do anything about it or not. I'm going home now, and I shall consult the stars the first thing I do to-night."

Uncle Philemon's propensity to consult the stars was well known in the neighborhood. Near his house he had erected a frail staging, on the top of which he had placed a few boards and a rude chair. Here taking his seat of a summer evening he would spend hours "star-gazing" and professed to believe that he had been able to foretell events and gain information that had been of incalculable advantage to him in his labors on his little farm. As Uncle Philemon was known to be greatly averse to physical labor, the signs in the heavens had usually warned him to postpone his planting until the season was so far advanced that the entire labor was put off until the following spring, when there would be a repetition of warning from the heavenly bodies. The same thing would occur when the grass was to be cut, or the trees to be felled for the supply of wood for the winter.

As a natural consequence, the larder of Uncle Philemon and his shrewish sister was in a chronic state of emptiness; and had it not been for the kindness of Reuben's mother and a few of the neighbors, there would have been suffering in the home. But none of these things moved the strange old man, and his faith in the virtue of his observations was unshaken, and his shiftless ways were in no wise improved.

But Reuben had been strongly impressed by the tale Uncle Philemon had related to him of his experience at the old bridge. He and Jacob had had an adventure there, too, and it occurred to him that somehow there might be a common explanation for them both. Not for a moment did he accept the supernatural nature of the tale the old man had told, but he deemed it wise not to give expression to his feelings, at least, for the present. He quickly decided, however, that there was something in it which ought to be investigated, and he at once decided that he would go to Jacob's home and confer with him.

Two heads were better than one, he had frequently heard his elders remark ; and he resolved that he would at least ask Jacob to go with him that very night to investigate, and between them they might not only find a solution of the mystery, but also, as he somehow hoped, something that might prove to be of interest, if not of value, in the troubrous times that were upon them.

"I'll go with you, Uncle Philemon," said Reuben, as the old man prepared to depart. "I want to see Jacob, and that will be right on your way."

"Glad to have your company," responded Uncle Philemon, cheerily. "I must be going, for Nancy'll think I'm lost. I haven't been home since yesterday morning."

"Come on, then."

Together they made their way down the lane and turned into the road. The morning sun was now well up in the sky, and the air was fragrant with the balmy odors of spring. The leaves were beginning to appear on the bushes, and the tall trees that grew close to the rough roadway were already beginning to display their summer garb. Multitudes of brightly colored birds flitted about in the brush, and the air resounded with their songs. Had it not been for the knowledge that parts of two contending armies were only a short distance away, there apparently would have been nothing in all the surroundings to mar the effect of a perfect spring day.

"Hold on a minute, Uncle Philemon," said Reuben, as they came near to a spring that gushed forth from the ground near the road; "I want a drink." Many a time the lad had stopped at the sheltered spot to water the horses he was driving or to obtain a drink for himself.

The old man stopped obediently, and Reuben knelt and prepared to drop his head to the level of the spring, for cups were not to be had, and, indeed, in those simple days they were looked upon as more or less unnecessary. Here was a thirsty lad and before him a bubbling spring of cool water, and any intermediate means were not required.

Just as Reuben's lips touched the water he heard in the brush close by a sound very like that of a "locust,"

but the lad knew that the noisy insects had not yet appeared, and he also was aware what the warning notes indicated. With a bound he leaped back into the road beside his companion, and, his face pale and his lips trembling, said hastily :—

“ That’s a rattler, Uncle Philemon ! It’s the first I’ve heard or seen this year.”

“ Yes, that’s what it is,” said the old man, eagerly. “ We’ll fix the varmint. I hate the wretches worse than I do poison.”

“ Hold on, and I’ll get a club,” said Reuben, as he began to look about him.

“ Never mind your club, lad. I’ve a better plan than that. I’ve dealt with the rascals before this. My Indian training wasn’t for nothing.”

“ What are you going to do ? ”

Uncle Philemon made no reply, and interested to see what he would do, Reuben abandoned his search and watched him. Drawing a long, keen knife from his belt, Uncle Philemon approached and began to inspect several young chestnut trees that were growing in the woods.

“ Keep your eye on him, lad,” he called ; “ we don’t want to let him get away. I’ve killed about twenty so far this spring, and I don’t want to let this fellow get away.”

Continuing his search he soon discovered what he was looking for, and taking his knife he cut a slit in

the back, that was more than a yard in length. Then he cut a circular gash at each extremity of the slit, and in a moment had torn the bark, untouched and whole, from the trunk. He cast the bark on the ground and continued his search until he had found another tree which met his requirements, and then, with a few dexterous movements by his knife repeated the operation.

"There, lad, I'll fix old satan now," he remarked, as he returned to the road, with the strip of bark in each hand.

Reuben made no reply, though he was watching his companion intently.

Taking the bark, Uncle Philemon deftly slipped the covering about each leg, and then with his long knife in his hand cautiously approached the spot where the warning rattle had been heard.

"You're not going to face that rattler in any such way as that!" exclaimed Reuben, aghast, as he perceived what Uncle Philemon was about to do.

The old man made no response, for evidently he had not heard the protest. He was muttering to himself, and uttering some strange gibberish that Reuben could not understand. It was almost like a chant, and there was a plaintive, pleading sound in his voice, as if he was coaxing the snake to come forth. In a moment the rattle sounded sharply, and Reuben saw Uncle Philemon suddenly change his position. There was something like a flash from the ground as the snake struck and the old man made a lunge with his knife.

"Are you hurt? Did he hit you?" called Reuben, excitedly grasping a fallen branch in his hands and rushing to the aid of his companion.

"Hurt? No, lad. Why should I be hurt?" replied Uncle Philemon, quietly, as he took the club from Reuben's hand and dealt the two parts of his enemy — for his knife had severed the body — a few sharp blows.*

"I'll have to take his rattles. If I left 'em here, they'd turn into more snakes," said Uncle Philemon, as soon as he was satisfied that the snake was indeed dead.

Reuben laughed, though he offered no protest, and soon they had resumed their journey.

"Did ye ever know what kind of a serpent 'twas that beguiled Eve?" inquired Uncle Philemon, solemnly.

"No, I never did. What was it?"

"'Twas a rattler, and ever since that time he's been so mad that he's tried to get even by poisonin' every son and daughter o' Eve he could find."

"But he got Eve to do what he wanted her to. I don't see what the snake has to be mad about. If he had failed I might be able to understand it."

* Of the rattlesnakes in the early days in New Jersey, Smith's *History of New Jersey* has the following: "One Robins, in Amwell, at a spot on his own plantation had upwards of ninety rattlesnakes killed in each of three springs successively. The parties performing it barked young chestnut trees of the size of their own legs and tied them on; and thus accoutred, they effected their business without much danger; but the snakes frequently bit the bark."

But Uncle Philemon did not deign to reply, and in a brief time they arrived at the lane which led to Jacob Goodnow's home. Reuben prepared to leave his companion here, and as he entered the lane, he stopped and said, —

"Uncle Philemon, you'll go with us to the covered bridge to-night, won't you?"

"I'll see what the signs have to say about it. My 'pinion is 'twould be better not to go; we might see mor'n we bargained for."

Reuben only laughed in response and turned toward the house, where he had seen Jacob standing on the low porch, evidently waiting for his coming. As soon as Reuben had explained what he had in mind to do, his friend eagerly agreed to his proposal that they should go with Uncle Philemon that very night to the covered bridge and strive to investigate the mystery which the old man had encountered; for that there was something mysterious in the place neither of the boys doubted, in spite of their disbelief in the causes Uncle Philemon had assigned.

It was nearly dusk when Reuben stopped for Jacob that night, and together they started for Uncle Philemon's quaint abode. They had not explained to any one the purpose of their expedition, only assuring the people at home that they would not be gone long. Nor had they thought that much time would be required. They would investigate the rude structure of the bridge

and then return. They might find something of interest, though what he suspected, Reuben did not even explain to his friend.

As they started together for Uncle Philemon's place, however, the enterprise began to assume a different aspect. The lengthening shadows and the oncoming darkness were not quite so assuring as the light of day. The serious nature of the task before them, and the thought of possible peril at the bridge, coupled as it now was with the recollection of the exciting experience they themselves had had there only a few hours before, made both the boys more serious than either would have been willing to acknowledge to the other.

Uncle Philemon's dogs, too, could be heard howling as the boys drew near their owner's place, and the weird mournful sound was not assuring. However, their own approach seemed to be ignored, and that was a source of some comfort, and in a brief time Jacob exclaimed,—

“There's Uncle Philemon now, up there on his old trap,” pointing, as he spoke, at the old man, who was seated on the top of his structure with his face unmoved and turned upward toward the sky.

“Here we are, Uncle Philemon!” called Reuben. It was somehow a source of comfort to know that there was some one near, and both boys began to run toward the place where the old man was seated.

But Uncle Philemon, though evidently he was aware of their approach, made no response except to wave his

hand toward them in token of his desire for silence, and remained unmoved in his position.

The boys ceased running and gazed curiously up at the man before them. What a strange sight he presented. And was it possible that he really could learn anything by observing the stars? An uneasy feeling crept over both the observers, as once more they began to approach the structure.

Suddenly there was a prolonged squeal, or cry, a crash of the falling rails, and Uncle Philemon and his structure fell in a heap to the ground. So startled were the observers that for a moment they were tempted to take to their heels and leave the uncanny spot far behind them, but a cry for help from Uncle Philemon speedily recalled them, and they hastily ran to the spot where he was lying.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE COVERED BRIDGE

AS Reuben and Jacob approached Uncle Philemon who to all appearances seemed to be held down by the staging which had fallen upon him, they were for a moment so startled by the sudden appearance of an animal, about the size of a large dog, that was running swiftly toward them, that they were on the point of turning and fleeing from the place, assured for the moment that the powers of darkness were indeed conspiring against them as well as against the old man.

It was Jacob who first recovered himself, and as he looked keenly at the animal, which apparently was as startled by the unexpected meeting as the boys themselves had been, and had turned with a series of short squeals or grunts and made for the woods, the lad exclaimed:—

“ ‘Tis a pig, Reuben. It’s one of Uncle Philemon’s grunters.”

“ Are you sure about it? ” inquired Reuben, peering intently at the fleeing animal.

“ Sure? I know it is! Just hear it, will you! ” he

added, as the terrified pig, emitting a final and prolonged squeal, disappeared from sight among the trees.

"You're right! That's what it is!" exclaimed Reuben, greatly relieved. "Come on, and we'll help Uncle Philemon out of his trouble."

In a brief time the boys had removed the rails, and then grasping the old man by the hands lifted him to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Reuben, as he gazed anxiously into Uncle Philemon's face.

"No, I think not," replied the old man, slowly rubbing his legs as he spoke. "No, I don't think I'm hurt seriously, anyway. But that was a sad fall of mine."

"How did it happen? What was the trouble, anyway?" said Jacob.

"And I was just going to find out so much," continued Uncle Philemon, as if he had not heard Jacob's question. "If that porker had waited two minutes longer, I'd have found out just what General Washington would have been mighty glad to know."

"The grunter!" said Reuben. "Did the pig have anything to do with your trouble?"

"Why, yes, I fear me he did," responded Uncle Philemon, reluctantly. "I fear me he did; I have good reasons for suspecting it, anyway."

"Did he climb up there with you, Uncle Philemon?"

inquired Jacob, soberly, though he gave Reuben a provoking nudge with his elbow as he spoke. "I didn't know that pigs studied the stars, too."

"That porker has pestered the life out o' me and Nancy. He roots up all the potatoes I've got, and we can't plant a thing in the garden that he doesn't find. If 'twasn't for one thing, I'd 'a' butchered him and turned him into sa'sage a long time ago. But as 'twas, I didn't have quite the heart to do it. Ye see he keeps the place clear o' the rattlers. He likes 'em as much as I hate 'em."

Reuben suspected there were other and more apparent causes for Uncle Philemon's neglect, but he said quietly, "How did he tumble down your place here?"

"Why, ye see, the little varmint likes to come up and rub his back agin the rails. I said 'shoo' to him half a dozen times to-night, but he'd only back up or just look up and eye me as if he wanted to find out whether I meant what I was saying or not. Well, I don't know but he did it on purpose, but I was a-shooing him just as you boys came up. Ye see, I was right in the middle o' one o' the best sights I ever see in the heavens, and I didn't want to be bothered. But that there pig just pushed so hard agin one o' the props that the first thing I knew I was down on the ground, and every bit o' my staging was down there too, and right on top o' me. I'm dreadful disapp'ited."

"You ought to be thankful you didn't break your

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neck, Uncle Philemon," said Reuben, sympathetically, repressing his desire to laugh. Jacob, however, had been unable to control his laughter and had turned sharply into the woods.

"What's that boy doin' there?" inquired Uncle Philemon, glancing at Jacob as he spoke. "Here, Jacob, come back here."

"I'm coming," said Jacob, as he rejoined his companions, though he still kept his face turned away from them; and Reuben could see that his friend was having much difficulty in restraining his delight.

"What ye doin' there among them trees?" inquired Uncle Philemon, sharply.

"I was looking for stars," replied Jacob, soberly; "I didn't know but some of them might have fallen down, too, along with you and your pig."

"Don't ye laugh, boys," said the old man, sharply, "for 'tisn't any laughing matter. And probably no one now will ever know how much I lost to-night. And I was just on the p'int o' gettin' the whole thing, too."

"Well, Uncle Philemon, you'll have to give up the plan to-night," said Reuben. "You can't fix up your platform till it's light again. And you'll come now with us to the old covered bridge, won't you? We want to find out about what you saw there, you know."

"No, I shan't go a step with ye. I'll not go an inch."

"Oh, please do, please do, Uncle Philemon!" said Jacob, in mock seriousness.

"No, sir-e-e! Not an inch! not a foot do I go with ye!"

"Why not?"

"'Why not?' Why, any fool could see that. Aren't the signs all agin it? Didn't my place all tumble down on my head and heels? No, sir! not much! I'm not such a fool as to tempt Providence after what I've had done to me to-night. If ye know when ye're well off, ye'll both on ye keep away from the covered bridge, too. My! I can hear them groans now!" and as he spoke, Uncle Philemon's voice sank to a low and impressive whisper.

Convinced that the old man was not to be swerved from his decision, the boys soon departed from the place, and as they came out into the road again, somehow the enthusiasm for the proposed venture at the old bridge seemed to disappear. As they walked on, the dim light and the dense gloom of the forests through which they were passing served to increase their feeling of reluctance, though neither would acknowledge it to the other.

Then, too, there were strange and weird cries from the depths of the woods, and once the sounds of men riding swiftly over the road came to their ears, but the men themselves did not appear, and even the sounds soon could be no longer heard.

"I don't believe there's much use in going to the old bridge to-night," said Jacob, at last.

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, we ought to have Uncle Philemon along with us when we go, and forty yoke of oxen couldn't drag him there to-night. He says the signs are all against it, and I think we'd better wait till he is ready."

"We won't go if you are afraid."

"Afraid? Who's afraid? I'm not," retorted Jacob, warmly. "But I'm not in favor of going there till Uncle Philemon can come along too. There's no such terrible hurry about it, anyway, as far as I can see. The ghost will keep. Maybe it'll keep better than we will. I wonder if Uncle Philemon really did hear that groaning there, as he said he did?"

"He thinks he heard it, anyway. Well, Jacob, we'll put it off a night or two if you want to. I don't feel like giving it up altogether, though."

"I don't, either," replied Jacob, with great boldness, now that he perceived that Reuben was about to agree to his suggestion. "You let me know when you want to go, and I'll be ready for you."

Accordingly the boys separated, and each departed for his own home, but when two days had elapsed, and the immediate effect of the meeting with Uncle Philemon was gone, Reuben became more convinced, as he thought over the matter, that there really was something at the covered bridge which ought to be looked into, and he resolved that he would make the attempt alone if neces-

sary, but it should be made that very night. When, however, he walked over to Uncle Philemon's abode, he found the old man as heartily opposed to the project as he had been in the night when his platform had so suddenly collapsed. Still determined to make the visit, Reuben stopped at Jacob's home, and though the assent was given with no apparent enthusiasm, nevertheless the lad agreed to go with his friend, and it was decided to start that very evening, as soon as the chores had been done.

When Jacob arrived at Reuben's house, he found the latter in readiness and waiting for him, and in a few minutes the boys set forth on their expedition. They had not explained to the older people what was in their minds nor where they were going, merely saying that they would be back late, and it would be unnecessary for any one to sit up for them.

The night was somewhat dark, and heavy clouds were passing low across the face of the sky. The air was chilly, and the wind as it whistled through the trees produced a sound that was weird and by no means comforting. Even the barking of a dog at some lonely house back from the road which they passed was almost startling, and as neither of the boys was in a mood for conversation, they seldom spoke, and both were wondering why it was that they had set forth on such a "fool's errand," and what it was they were expecting to gain by their attempt.

Reuben carried a lantern, though he had not yet lighted it, and each of the lads had brought his own gun with him. But in the darkness, and in the presence of such enemies as Uncle Philemon had declared were to be found in the old bridge, such weapons were not likely to avail much. However, they kept sturdily on their way, doubtless each wishing that the other would suggest that the expedition should at least be postponed to some more convenient season, if not altogether abandoned, and at last they arrived at a place from which the long, low bridge could be dimly seen in the distance. The noisy waters of the brook could be faintly heard, but they only served to render the prevailing stillness more intense. Neither could behold the expression on his companion's face, and perhaps for the peace of mind of each this was better. Their pace slackened as they drew near, and then they halted for a brief consultation.

"What shall we do now, Reube?" inquired Jacob, huskily.

"Is your gun all right?"

"Yes."

"Then come on. We'll go through the bridge to the other side, and then if we don't find anything we'll come back again. I don't much believe we're going to see any ghosts here to-night." Reuben endeavored to speak calmly, but his heart was beating furiously, and his voice trembled somewhat in spite of his best efforts to be calm.

Together, then, the boys approached the bridge. The darkness was intense within its borders, though a faint light could be seen at the farther entrance. The noise of the waters beneath them increased in volume, but not another sound was to be heard. Each could hear the breathing of the other as they stepped upon the loose planks, and a low exclamation escaped Jacob's lips as one of the boards creaked and groaned beneath his feet.

For a moment they halted and listened breathlessly, but apparently no one besides themselves was there. The bridge itself seemed to be almost endless, and they felt almost as if their feet were being held back or that they were climbing some steep mountain-side. But they were drawing steadily nearer to the longed-for goal, and as yet they had not been molested. As for making investigations of their own, the thought did not occur to either, so soon had the very object for which they had come been forgotten by both. Moved by a common impulse they quickened their pace and drew long breaths, as in a moment they stood in the open air outside the rambling structure.

"That wasn't so bad, Jake," said Reuben, in a low voice, as he turned to his friend.

"No, no, that was all right," responded Jacob in a suspicious tremor.

"We haven't found anything," added Reuben, with increasing confidence.

"Oh! Look! Look! Look there!" said Jacob, sud-

denly, in a fierce whisper, gripping his companion fiercely by the arm and pointing, as he spoke, through the bridge at the entrance on the opposite end.

Startled, Reuben looked quickly in the direction indicated, and for a moment could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes, for in the dim light he yet could plainly see what looked to be very like a man in mid air. Steadily the man rose until in a brief time he had disappeared from sight, apparently going directly through the roof, just as Uncle Philemon had declared he had done at the time when he himself had seen the strange sight.

For a moment the boys were so startled that not a word was spoken. Then as the reaction came, Jacob whispered fiercely, "Come on, Reuben, let's get out of this."

As he spoke, he started as if he was about to run, but Reuben quickly grasped him by the arm and said: "Not that way, Jake, we've got to go back the way we came. We can't cross the river anywhere else."

"Back *there*!" exclaimed Jacob, aghast. "All right then, come on," and before Reuben fairly realized what he was doing, Jacob was running back across the bridge at his utmost speed. The loose boards rattled and groaned, and still Jacob sped on, and Reuben watched him, fascinated, and as if he had no thought of following.

Suddenly a roar or a groan broke in upon the stillness of the night. The bridge seemed to be filled with the

weird sound, which to Reuben appeared to come from every side and to increase in volume. Recalled to the necessity of action, he instantly darted after his friend, who by this time had crossed the bridge and disappeared from sight, and ran as if his very life depended upon his exertions. The wild, weird cries or groans increased, and hardly aware what he was doing, Reuben shouted and called to his friend.

CHAPTER X

AN UNLOOKED-FOR MEETING

AS Reuben Denton fled up the side of the low hill that rose before him in the darkness, he could hear no response to his call, nor could he discover that Jacob was anywhere near. He glanced quickly behind him, but the dim outlines of the rambling bridge were not reassuring, as the roar of the groans or cries could still be heard, and he redoubled his efforts to flee from the region. He had gained the summit of the hill and was speeding along the level stretch that lay before, hoping every moment to overtake Jacob, of whom he had neither seen nor heard anything since the lad had fled with the speed of the wind across the bridge.

Reuben still clung to his gun and lantern, though why he had done so he could hardly have explained, even to himself. His call to Jacob had not been repeated, but he was hoping now to overtake him soon, and already the first effects of his sudden terror were beginning to disappear, and he was wishing heartily that the flight had not been quite so precipitate. Every yard he placed between himself and the old bridge was

now strengthening his growing feeling of confidence, and he was peering eagerly before him for a sight of Jacob, hoping, as he was, that still they might be able to find some explanation for the mysterious events which had occurred within the shadows of the rude old bridge.

"Ah, there he is!" said Reuben to himself, as he heard the sound of some one in the road before him. He checked his speed, and proceeding more leisurely, expected soon to come up with Jacob. He did not call to him as he had done when he fled from the bridge, for now he was more self-possessed as he realized that whatever the peril was, at least it lay behind him.

The sound was coming nearer, and suddenly it became evident to Reuben that the man could not be Jacob, for he was coming on horseback. Startled by the unexpected discovery, the lad turned abruptly and endeavored to gain the shelter of the trees, that here were farther back from the roadside than they were in many places, a long strip of cleared land, scarred by burned or charred stumps, lying between the woods and the highway. In his eagerness to escape he stumbled and fell, as his foot caught in a long, exposed root of a tree, and he was thrown to the ground.

As he rose to his feet, his heart sank within him when he heard the stranger call sharply to him, "Stop! Stop where you are, or I'll shoot!"

Reuben stopped obediently, not even attempting to

make use of the gun in his hands, for fear now again possessed him, and he believed that any movement on his part would bring a shot from the man in the road.

"Come out here! Come back to the road!" called the man, sharply; and Reuben, firmly convinced that all further attempts to escape would be useless, slowly came back to the road and approached his captor, whom he could see seated on the back of his horse and peering eagerly at him as he drew near.

With a heavy heart, and hardly lifting his eyes from the ground, Reuben came close to the horse and waited for the man to speak. He was thinking of many things now, and in his desperation a measure of courage had returned. Why could he not give the horse a sudden blow, and in the confusion that would follow he would be able to place a considerable distance between him and the stranger, and the darkness would favor any attempt he might make to escape? With the thought a hope—somewhat slight, to be sure, yet nevertheless comforting—came to him, and he glanced up and down the road before he looked up at the man before him.

"Who are you? What are you doing here at this hour of the night? Give an account of yourself!" demanded the man, sternly.

"Oh, Mr. Coddington! Mr. Coddington!" exclaimed Reuben, with a great sigh of relief, as he recognized the voice of the speaker. "Don't you know me?"

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Coddington, sharply,

at the same time leaning low on his horse's neck and peering intently at Reuben.

"It's Reuben Denton," replied the lad, approaching still more closely to the rider and looking up into his face as he spoke. "It's Reuben! Reuben Denton!"

"So I see."

"You know me, don't you?" said Reuben, eagerly, as if he was fearful that not even now was his captor convinced of his identity.

"Yes. I see that it is Reuben Denton," said Mr. Coddington, quietly, "but what I don't understand is that I should find you out here alone, and in the night. Don't you know it's not safe, lad?" Mr. Coddington spoke not unkindly, though his voice was somewhat stern, but in his relief Reuben was so overjoyed that he gave heed to nothing but the question itself.

"Why — why —" he stammered. It was not so easy as he thought to explain to others, least of all to the man before him, why he was so far from home, on a lonely road and in the night-time.

"Tell me, Reuben!" demanded Mr. Coddington, sharply.

"Why — why — Jacob Goodnow and I came out here to see the old bridge."

"What?"

"Yes, sir. You see Uncle Philemon had told us that the place had ghosts in it. We laughed at him and came out to see for ourselves."

"Well?"

"We shan't laugh at him any more."

"What did you see?"

Mr. Coddington spoke quietly, but if there had been sufficient light Reuben might have seen on the man's face a peculiar expression, but he could hardly have told whether it was one of amusement or anxiety. Perhaps it was a mingling of both.

Not being able to see it in the dim light, however, Reuben, rejoicing that his own face was concealed in the darkness, said, "Why, to tell the truth, Mr. Coddington, we saw the very things Uncle Philemon said that he saw there."

"What were they?"

"Why—why—we saw a man that looked as if he was hanging right in mid-air, and while we looked he went right up through the roof. Yes, sir, that's just what he did! I know it doesn't sound very probable, but Jacob and I both saw it, and he can tell you as well as I."

"Where is Jacob?"

"I don't know. He ran ahead of me, and I haven't seen him since. I took you for him when I first saw you."

"Then he didn't stay to help you find out what the thing you'd seen really was?"

"No, we neither of us stayed," acknowledged Reuben. Again he was rejoiced that the darkness con-

cealed the flush that he knew had crept over his face. "You see, Mr. Coddington, the way of it was like this: we first walked across the bridge, but we didn't see or hear anything; but while we were standing in the other end we looked back, and both of us saw this man swinging right in the air, and go right up through the roof. Then while we were standing there, like two bumps on a log,—for it did give us a queer feeling and no mistake, Mr. Coddington,—all at once we heard the loudest and the worst groaning I ever heard in all my life. It just seemed to come right up through the planks, and the old bridge was full of it, just the way Uncle Philemon told about it. I don't know what it was, but it was the worst sound I ever heard."

"And you didn't stop to look into it?"

"No, sir, we didn't stop for anything. I don't think I had stopped to breathe till you called to me."

There was a broad smile on Mr. Coddington's face now, but in the darkness Reuben was unable to see it. After a brief pause the man said quietly, "Reuben, would you like to go back there with me now, and help me to find out what it is in the old bridge that has frightened you so?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I would." Reuben spoke hesitatingly, and his evident reluctance plainly pleased his hearer, for the smile on Mr. Coddington's face once more appeared.

"I think you'd better go home," said he, at last.

"What do you think it was there?" inquired Reuben.

"Not being there with you, it would be difficult to say."

"But do you believe there's anything in Uncle Philemon's stories?"

"You seem to think there is, and judging from Jacob's failure to wait for you, evidently he's somewhat of the same opinion, too."

"But what do you think, Mr. Coddington?"

"I think the best plan is for you boys to stay home nights, unless you're needed, as it's very likely you will be soon. From what I learn I'm sure the redcoats are gathering at Brunswick; and whether they're planning to move on to Philadelphia or fight Washington here, no man can tell yet. But there certainly are a good many more regulars and Hessians at Brunswick than were there a few days ago."

"Does General Washington know of it?"

"Probably. He isn't asleep, we can all rest assured of that."

"Then why doesn't he do something?"

"It may be that he is doing something. He probably won't ask our advice or tell us of his plans. But I'll tell you what, Reuben, if I were in your place, I wouldn't try to follow up any more of Uncle Philemon's stories. Best let them go with the telling."

"You don't really believe there's anything in them, do you?"

"Who can say? No harm can come from leaving them alone, Reuben. I hear that you saw Abraham Patten the other night," he added, in a lower voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you seen him since?"

"No, sir."

"Well, Reuben, don't say anything to any one about your adventure to-night. That isn't asking very much of you; and to show you that I have reasons for asking what I do, and have confidence, too, in you, I don't mind telling you that if you'll come to my home some day next week, after Wednesday, I may be able to tell you something you didn't find out to-night. That is, if I understand you to say that neither you nor Jacob will say anything before that time of what you have just seen or heard."

"I can promise for myself, but I can't for Jacob before I've seen him."

"Well," added Mr. Coddington, thoughtfully, "I don't know as any very great harm would be done if he should tell, but I'd rather he wouldn't. I'll leave it with you that way, then, Reuben. Fix it if you can. Good night!" and in a moment he had touched his horse with his spurs and disappeared down the road in the direction of the bridge.

Puzzled by the words as well as by the unexpected departure of Mr. Coddington, Reuben gazed after him a moment and then, turning sharply about, proceeded

on his way toward his home. The mystery of the bridge was in no wise decreased by the implied promise of Mr. Coddington to explain it to him. How did he know, and what did he know? And then, too, there was the disturbing report of the gathering forces at Brunswick. Of that fact he felt free to speak to his family, and we may be sure his words, when he reported at the breakfast table on the following morning what he had heard, were not reassuring.

Reuben did not see Jacob for several days, and as neither of the boys apparently was eager to face the other in the light of recent events, the meeting was likely to be postponed until other circumstances should bring it about.

A few nights after the events just recorded, Reuben and all the Denton family had retired for the night and had fallen into a deep sleep. If they had been awake and had peered out of the quaint windows of the house, they would have seen a strange sight and one that doubtless would have troubled them greatly. For moving with stealthy and silent tread up the road was a force of redcoats and Hessians from Brunswick, and their destination was the American camp at Bound Brook. Lord Cornwallis himself was among the numbers, and so were General Grant and General Matthews, as well as Count, or Colonel, Dunop.

The silence that rested over the Denton household was like that which rested over all the lonely homes

in the region ; and so, as the soldiers of King George marched on over the covered bridge and then, abandoning the road, entered the woods, no eyes but two that gleamed down upon them from among the rafters of the old bridge as they passed had seen them.

Steadily through the forest the forces advanced, until they were so near the intrenchments at Bound Brook that they could hear the American sentry call "All's well," and then, lying on their arms, they waited for the slow hours to pass ; and then, just as the morning gun of the camp was fired, with shouts and shots they rushed upon the patrols.

So sudden, so unexpected, was the onslaught that only a very slight resistance was made, and in a few minutes a hundred or more of Lincoln's men lay dead upon the field, and most of the camp stores had fallen into the hands of the victors. Then they marched in triumph back to Brunswick town, and with them were carried more than seventy prisoners, who had failed to escape when their comrades fled.

Among the men who were taken was Phil Denton, and with them went also one who had been found in irons, waiting a sentence of death. And this man was Stephen Carle, whom Reuben Denton and his neighbors knew to be a stealer of horses and one of the worst of men in all Jersey.

CHAPTER XI

A JOURNEY

ON the morning following the attack on the forces at Bound Brook, in the early light and before the family had assembled at the breakfast table, Reuben Denton had gone to the barns to direct and assist the negroes in the care of the stock. This task now, as we know, was much lighter than it had been a few months before this time, for only a few cows and one lone horse remained of all that Mr. Denton had owned. Still the work, though it was slight, must be attended to, and Reuben, as much from force of habit as from a desire to look after the tasks of the negroes, had left the house intent upon the duty which had been his ever since his brothers had enlisted in the American troops.

As he was passing Cato's rude little house of logs, he saw the door slowly open and, without a thought that any other than Cato or one of his numerous pickaninnies was approaching, he called out: "Hi, there, Cato! It's time you were bestirring yourself! Things have come to a pretty pass when white folks have to get up to call the darkies to their work."

To his surprise the door was hastily closed, and no response was given to his hail.

Amazed, and perhaps somewhat angry as well, that his summons should not be heeded, Reuben ran hastily to the door and, pushing against it, tried to open it, as he said: "Cato, you rascal! What does this mean? Open this door before I break it in."

"Yas, sah! Yas, sah! I done open de do' for you, Massa Reuben."

But somehow the door remained closed, and Reuben was positive that he could hear the sound of whispered words within. There was something strange in all this, and, instantly quitting his hold upon the wooden latch, he ran quickly around to the rear of the little cabin, where he was aware there was another door; and as he approached he started back in amazement, as he beheld a man just coming out of the doorway. He was clad in the suit that marked the Jersey Blues, and only one quick glance was required to convince Reuben that it was Abraham Patten himself who was standing before him.

Amazed by the unexpected sight, for a moment Reuben was speechless, and before he had fairly recovered from the shock of surprise the man before him said: "You have found me here and I see that you recognize me, Reuben Denton. Will you please step inside? I want to speak to you."

"Come out to the barn, that will be better," Reuben

replied; and as the man offered no objection, in a few moments both were standing on the barn floor. Neither had spoken as they had left Cato's cabin, and the bewilderment of Reuben's thoughts was great. There flashed into his mind the several meetings with this man that he already had had, and somehow the trouble at the covered bridge came back vividly now. Even the feeling of surprise he had had at finding him in Cato's cabin was forgotten in the mystery that somehow seemed to pervade the man who now stood before him.

"You didn't expect to find me where you did?" remarked Abraham Patten, sharply.

"No."

"I didn't expect to be there, either. Reuben, there was a fight, a battle, last night."

"There was?" Reuben was all attention now, and other things were ignored in the startling intelligence which Abraham Patten conveyed.

"Yes, at Bound Brook. I've just come from there. The regulars and Hessians marched from Brunswick and surprised the troops just before daylight. They have gone back now, and our men are coming back to their quarters again. I stopped at Cato's cabin because I wanted to see you or get some word to the family."

"Why? Is anything wrong? Has anything happened to my brothers?" demanded Reuben, quickly. He was all attention now, and his face had become strangely white.

"There were about a hundred killed," said Abraham Patten, slowly.

"Was Bob, was Phil—?" Reuben was unable to complete the question.

"I saw Bob not more than an hour and a half ago."

"But Phil? Was he—?"

"He was taken to Brunswick, a prisoner."

"Oh!" said Reuben, with a sigh of relief. "Was that all?

"All? I should think it was enough. They got Stephen Carle, too. He was in irons and was to have been hanged in a few days. But he's slipped out of the noose this time, and he may thank his lucky stars for it too, or Lincoln's delay, I don't know which." Then in a few words Abraham Patten related to Reuben all that he knew of the affair, and as his story came to an end, he said: —

"Now, Reuben, you must, of course, tell your people all that I have told you, but you mustn't tell them that it was I that told you. Just say you saw some one from Bound Brook, and that will be enough. Promise me!" he added sternly.

"I promise," said Reuben, simply, for his mind was so filled with the startling information he had received that he obeyed as a matter of impulse.

Even the mystery of Abraham Patten was for the moment forgotten, and the fact that he had seen him first clad in the scarlet uniform of the British, and then

had met him in the night at the covered bridge, and now beheld him dressed in the garb of the Jersey Blues, was pushed back in his thoughts. He was aware that Abraham was gone, and he half consciously watched him as he saw him crouching and running rapidly along the line of low fence that led to the adjoining woods ; and then, with a heavy heart, the lad turned toward his father's house. There were evil tidings to be told, and he must be the one to tell them.

As he entered the kitchen he beheld his father and mother there, and his own dejected countenance at once caught his mother's attention.

" What is it, Reuben ? " she demanded quickly.
" Anything wrong at the barn ? "

" No, ma'am ; everything there is all right enough, I think ; but Phil's a prisoner."

" Phil a prisoner ? What do you mean ? "

Then Reuben related the story as it had been told him. His father was wringing his hands, and his mother's face became deadly white for a moment, but there was quickly a tightening of the firm lips, and her voice was firm as she said :—

" Who told you this, Reuben ? "

" A man who had just come from Bound Brook. He said he stopped here just to leave word, and then he was gone. He went out toward the chestnut woods."

" You don't know, then, who he was ? I wonder if he has spoken truly ? "

Half guiltily, Reuben held his peace, but his father, wringing his hands again, said :—

“ Oh, I knew it would be just this way when the boys went into the army ! Oh, why couldn’t they stay at home and be satisfied ? And now Phil will suffer, for they’ll send him to the sugar-house or the prison ships in New York. I wish I had never come to Jersey ! But I’ll leave ! I’ll leave to-morrow, to-day, in an hour ! I won’t stay here another day,” he added, in a sudden burst of anger.

“ I don’t know where you’ll go, husband,” said Mrs. Denton, quietly. “ The first thing we’ve got to do is to find out if this report is true.”

“ Oh, it’s true. I have no doubt of that,” groaned Mr. Denton. “ It’s always true. Nothing but ill luck ever comes to me. Why did I ever come here ? Why did I come ? Why did I come ? ”

Ignoring the complainings of her husband, Mrs. Denton said, “ We’ll have breakfast now, and we’ll decide then what’s to be done.”

There was a silence as the family took their seats at the table, but the meal was not ended when Mrs. Denton said decidedly : “ I’ve thought it all out. I know what’s to be done, and who’s to do it.”

All looked up at her, but no one spoke, though Mr. Denton groaned as if he was in pain.

“ Yes, I know,” she continued. “ Husband, you are to take Cato and go to Bound Brook at once. You’ll not

be molested, either on the way or there, and you can find out if the attack really was made and if Phil really is—is—;” for a moment her voice broke, but she quickly regained her self-control and said, “I’m almost certain Phil is a prisoner, and yet we want to make sure. And I don’t think we ought to work on any other supposition. If it should be learned that he wasn’t taken, then no harm will be done in carrying out the other part of my plan; and if he is, then just so much time will be saved. Reuben, I want you to take the colt and start at once for Morristown.”

“Morristown?” gasped her husband. “What do you mean? What’s that for? It won’t do any good to go to Morristown.”

Ignoring the interruption, the resolute woman, looking eagerly at Reuben, who had not spoken a word, though his manner betrayed his surprise at what his mother had said, continued, “Yes, Reuben, I want you to go to Morristown and appeal to General Washington himself.”

“What can he do?” murmured Reuben.

“Oh, he’ll do something, I’m sure he will! He will arrange for Phil’s exchange. He never will let him be taken to New York. Oh, my boy never, never, could endure what the poor prisoners are said to have to suffer in those awful prison-houses. And Phil is right near us now, and it will be so easy to fix it all. I’m sure of it! I know it can be done; and, Reuben, you must go,

and you must start right away. Don't wait a minute!
Not a minute!"

Reuben had no heart to protest, nor had the training he had received been of a character that would lead him to object to anything his parents bade him do; and yet in his own heart he was convinced that the project was utterly hopeless. What likelihood was there that he would even be permitted to speak to General Washington? He had heard of his sternness, and how he ever insisted upon all the details of military etiquette being duly observed. Was it, therefore, in the least likely that he, a farmer lad, would be permitted to come into his presence? Then, too, however much the great man might sympathize with a heart-broken mother, there were hundreds of just such suffering women in the colonies, and the harsh times of war left slight opportunities for yielding to the softer feelings, no matter how much his own heart might incline him to such a course of action.

However, on Reuben's part the only thing to be done was to obey; and, accordingly, as soon as breakfast had been eaten he hastened to the barn, and bridling the colt, returned to the house and stood before the kitchen door with the bridle-rein in his hands. Quickly his mother came forth, and at her bidding he carefully strapped upon his horse's back the small bundle she brought him, and took the few pieces of coin she gave him and placed them in his pocket.

"Now, Reuben," she said, "you may be gone two or three days, for it's a long ride to Morristown, and you may be delayed, though I hope and pray that you may have no trouble on the way. I've put something for you to eat in the bundle, though I think you'll have no difficulty in getting what you want to eat at some of the taverns; and if you find you have to, then you must put up there nights. Be very careful what you say to strangers; and I want you to stop at Mr. Coddington's and ask him for the directions you need as to the way. Now, be careful, my boy, and I shall hope to see you safe and sound at home again in a very few days."

His mother drew his head toward her, kissed him once, and then hurriedly withdrew into the house; and Reuben, leaping lightly upon the back of his horse, spoke a word to him and set forth on his eventful ride.

It was nearly an hour afterward when he rode into the yard adjoining Mr. Coddington's house, and dismounting, prepared to tie his horse to the hitching-post, that stood near the well. For some unaccountable reason, for he was not able to explain what he was doing, even to himself, he abandoned his purpose to tie the horse there and started toward the barn, and then, again changing his mind, led his horse into the woods in the rear of the house, and tying him to a sapling, returned to the kitchen door.

In response to his knock Hannah herself opened the door, and as she perceived who her visitor was, a slight

tinge of color came into her cheeks, as she said, "Why, Reuben Denton! You're the very last man I was expecting to see this morning. Come in."

"Is your father at home?" inquired Reuben, as he followed her into the house.

"No, he isn't. Then you came to see him and not me, did you?"

"Yes — no; that is, I want to see him."

Hannah laughed merrily at his evident confusion, and then said, soberly, "I'm sorry, Reuben, that he isn't here, if you want to see him; but he went away before daylight."

"Bound Brook?"

"Yes. Then you've heard of the fight there?"

"Yes; and I heard that Phil was taken."

"So did I."

"Then it must be true."

"Why? Because I said so?"

"No; because you've heard it as well as I."

"I'm sorry, Reuben."

"We all are."

"Where are you going now?"

"To Morristown."

"To Morristown?" exclaimed Hannah, her eyes flashing. "Then you are going to enlist?"

"No, that is, I'm not going to now."

"I'm sorry. If I was a man, I'd enlist," she said resolutely; and as Reuben glanced at her vigorous

body and her flashing eyes, he felt somehow ashamed that he, too, was not with his brothers among the soldiers.

"My brothers are there, you know, and somebody had to stay at home. My father is not well," he said.

"No, sir! It's no time for anybody to stay at home! Every man ought to go now! Just think of what happened last night at Bound Brook!"

"But your father doesn't go!" said Reuben, marvelously stirred by Hannah's words and yet wishing to defend himself.

"My father!" retorted Hannah, sharply. "You don't know what you are talking about! My father, I'd have you to know —"

Abruptly Hannah stopped, for the sound of horsemen had been heard in the yard. Together Reuben and the girl rushed to the door, and before them they beheld two men dismounting. One man was dressed in the uniform of a British officer and the other was clad in the strange garb of the Hessians.

CHAPTER XII

A REPRISAL

REUBEN DENTON instantly perceived that he had been seen, and that to attempt to flee now would be but to increase his peril. Both the soldiers were strangers to him, and there was the hope—not strong, it is true, but still it was his chief reliance now—that he himself would not be molested. He had been to Brunswick twice since the soldiers of King George had occupied the town, and had been civilly treated on each occasion, but that was before the numbers had been increased and the skirmishes at Quibbletown and Bound Brook had occurred. It was different now; and as Reuben glanced at the men he could not repress the rising fear in his heart, though he still stood in the doorway beside Hannah, and waited with such calmness as he could maintain for the men to make known their errand.

The British officer dismounted, and tossing his bridle to his Hessian companion, advanced toward the house, respectfully removing his hat as he spoke.

"Is this where Mr. Coddington lives?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Hannah, quietly.

"Is he at home?"

"No, sir."

"He is not?" The officer spoke sharply, and his manner betrayed his doubt, if not his disbelief, in the reply Hannah had made.

"No, sir," said Hannah, firmly, an expression of anger manifesting itself in her voice and in the flash of her eyes as she spoke.

"Where is he?" said the officer, suspiciously.

"I don't know. He doesn't tell me all his plans, and I have no better means than you for finding out where he is, if he doesn't choose to tell me."

"But this is where he lives—this is his home?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"And he is not here?"

"No, sir."

"Are you telling me the truth, young woman?" the officer demanded sternly.

"That's what I usually do," replied Hannah, tartly; "and I don't think I should change just because a red-coat and a Dutch butcher happen to be at my father's house."

Reuben was almost frightened at the boldness of the girl, and he glanced apprehensively at her as she spoke. His manner was observed by the officer, who at once turned and addressed his questions to him.

"You know where he is, young man," he said sternly.

"I wish I did, for I have come to see him."

"You are not his son, then?"

"No, sir."

"You are his daughter?" he said to Hannah.

"I am."

"Well, I am sorry to say it, but we must ourselves search the place. We have orders to — to — see him." He hesitated for a moment, but his manner was not lost upon Hannah. "And we must attempt to find him," he added.

"You will do as you please, I suppose. That's the way the redcoats do, I understand, when the men are away from home."

Instead of becoming angry at the bold words of the girl, the officer laughed good-naturedly, as he said, "What a little vixen it is! If you could tell me where I might find Mr. Coddington, I don't know that we would bother you any more."

"I can do that."

"What? I thought you said just now that you didn't know where he was."

"I did."

"I don't understand," said the officer, laughing as he spoke, and glancing at the girl with such evident interest that Reuben's anger at him instantly increased, though he was wise enough not to attempt to show it.

"You asked me where he was," said Hannah, "and I told you I didn't know. You asked me where you

might find him, and I told you I thought I could tell you, but that isn't the same thing as saying where he is."

"No, that's so. Well, where might we find him?"

"You *might* find him at Bound Brook. That's where some of our people are likely to be this morning."

The officer laughed as he said, "That's more than you could have said last night, for the rebels were mighty scarce there then."

Hannah's face flushed with anger, but she made no reply.

"Oh, well," said the officer, "you rebels will soon see that Providence isn't on your side, and will give up this worse than useless fight."

"Yah," growled the Hessian, who up to this time had taken no part in the conversation. "Isht dakes de veek to fool der Deutsche, isht dakes de day to fool de Anglees, isht dakes ter tyfel to fool de rebel, but all together couldn't fool de Lord."

The officer laughed as his companion spoke, and then he said: "You see how it is, even the Dutchmen know that everything is against you. It's a pity that you can't see it for yourselves. I understand the women are worse rebels than the men. We shall have to face an army in petticoats pretty soon, I suspect."

The flashing eyes of the girl before him certainly were an evidence of the truth of the statement he had just made, though she made no response.

"I shall have to take a look, though, through the

house and about the place before I go back to Brunswick," he continued. "These are my orders, and much as I dislike to, I shall be compelled to obey."

Still Hannah made no reply, nor did she offer to move from her place in the doorway. Calling to his comrade to dismount and tie the horses to the post and then to accompany him in his search, the officer and the Hessian entered the house, Reuben stepping back from the place he had occupied to permit them to pass.

"Who are you, young man?" demanded the officer, pausing for a moment.

"He's a neighbor," said Hannah, quickly, before Reuben could reply.

"And a rebel, too, probably."

"It's easy to call names," said Hannah, fearlessly.

"I'll see you again in a minute," said the officer, as he and his comrade turned and passed up the low stairway.

"Reuben," said Hannah, in a low voice, "take these horses and start on your way."

"What?" The lad was too startled by her words to protest.

"Do what I tell you! The men are upstairs, and you can get a good start."

"But you'll be left here alone."

"What of that? Don't you think I can take care of myself?"

As Reuben's manner implied some doubt, she said

eagerly: "You couldn't protect me if they wanted to harm me, as I'm sure they don't. I can look out for myself. There's a gun right in the kitchen, and I shan't hesitate if I have to use it. But I shan't have any trouble. I know I shan't. Now, Reuben," she added eagerly, "do what I tell you! Start right away, before they see you. Be quick! Be quick, or it'll be too late!"

"I left my own horse out there in the woods."

"I'll look after it. Now go, or I shall take the horses myself and leave you here with these men. Take your choice!"

As Reuben glanced into the flashing eyes of the resolute girl, he was convinced that she meant what she said, and glancing for a moment apprehensively up the stairs and not seeing or hearing anything of the men, he turned and quickly went to the place where the horses were tied. It was but the work of a moment to free them, though the lad's hands were trembling in his excitement, and he was glancing most of the time toward the house. He could see Hannah in the doorway, and her quick and eager motions for him to make haste were an added incentive. Every moment he expected to see the men appear, and to hear the sound of their pistols as they fired at him. But with breathless haste he placed his foot in the stirrup and swung himself lightly into the saddle; then grasping the bridle of the other horse, and leaning low on the neck of the

one he was riding, and his eyes fixed upon the low windows in the upper room of the little house, he turned his horses toward the lane.

Hannah still stood in the doorway watching him, but as yet his departure had not been discovered. If he could only get a good start down the lane, he knew that he could escape, for the men knew nothing of the horse he had left in the woods, and the only one that Mr. Coddington possessed he doubtless had taken with him in his early morning journey.

He had entered the lane and was beginning to hope that he was not discovered, when to his alarm he heard shouts from the house and, glancing quickly behind him, beheld the two men running from the door.

"Hi, there! Stop! Stop, you young rascal! Stop, or I'll shoot!" he heard the officer call.

The crucial moment had arrived, and it seemed to Reuben as if his very breathing had stopped. Leaning still lower upon the neck of the horse he was riding, he called to both horses to go, while he shook the bridle-rein and drummed his feet against the sides of the animal he was riding. For a moment the other horse snorted and reared and pulled so strongly upon the rein that Reuben was fearful that he would either be dragged from his seat or compelled to let go his hold on the horse he was leading; but with a great effort he managed both to keep his seat and retain his grasp on the reins of both horses.

He was aided by the loud reports of the pistols of the men behind him and the whistling of the bullets as they passed close to his ears; but he was unharmed, and the sound had served to start the other horse, which now plunged forward with such frantic leaps that again Reuben was fearful that he would be compelled to let him go.

In a moment, however, the horses were running side by side, and the lad was nearing the longed-for road. The shouts and calls, and the sound of the pistols from behind him still kept up, but a running and angry marksman and a still more swiftly disappearing target apparently had slight connection. At all events, when Reuben turned the two horses into the open road and in response to his words they still maintained the swift pace at which they had been running, he felt safe, and even exultant. He partly rose in his stirrups and, taking his hat in his hand, he shook it and shouted derisively at his helpless pursuers. He could see Hannah, for a moment, still standing in the doorway, and she was waving her sunbonnet at him as an encouragement.

But Reuben required no incentives, now that he felt assured that he was safe. His heart sank for a moment as he thought of the fearless girl whom he had left alone in the house, but somehow he still felt confident that she would be able to take care of herself, even in the presence of these two men whose anger without doubt would be intense over their loss. But his own problem was press-

ing now and required all his attention, so keeping to the road, Reuben held his horses to the swift pace at which they were running, until he had left his angry pursuers so far behind him that he was convinced that he had nothing more to fear from them, and then his speed slackened, and he began to think more seriously of the problem that immediately confronted him.

In a general way he knew the direction in which Morristown lay, but he had never been there, and there were possibilities not only of mistaking the roads, but also of other perils far worse than that. The affair at Bound Brook would be sufficient of itself to rouse both armies, as well as the people dwelling in the region between the camps held by each ; and Reuben knew that all his wits would be required to make his way in safety to the place where Washington had his quarters.

In the course of two hours he had passed beyond the region with which he was familiar and soon came to a fork in the roads. Thus far he had met only one man on the road, and though he had stopped and gazed curiously at him, he had not offered to molest him, doubtless looking upon him as some one connected with the army.

But now Reuben was puzzled to know which road he should follow. Both led through the forests, and the trees were thick, even down to the very place where the road divided. In his uncertainty he almost wished that Uncle Philemon was with him, for the old man would have some method by which the troubrous problem might

be solved. But at last, after trying to picture in his mind the general outlines of the region, he took the road that led to the left and swiftly resumed his journey.

For a time he was convinced that he had decided wisely; but when the road became rougher and the evidences of the lack of travel became more and more apparent, he began to glance apprehensively about him, fearful that he had after all made a mistake.

Still he continued on his way, though by this time the road had ceased to be anything like that through which he had come, and only a partly beaten and somewhat narrow pathway lay before him. He had passed, he knew, the high hills, or "mountains," as some of the people termed them, which lay beyond the valley in which was his home, but now he perceived that he was climbing a hillside again.

He had lost his way, that was evident now; and what was worse was the fact that the sun was disappearing from sight, and darkness would soon be all about him.

CHAPTER XIII

WASHINGTON'S ROCK

IF Reuben Denton had not been so stirred by the exciting events of the day, and his very eagerness in searching for his road had not made him unmindful of certain landmarks that otherwise would not have escaped his attention, he might have recognized the place where he halted as one where he had been several times before. For in reality the lad, though he was unaware of the fact, had turned back in following the rough and winding roadway that led through the mountains, and now was but a few miles distant from his father's house, and was within a few rods of the borders of the hill itself.

The horses had lost all their spirit in the long climb of the mountain side, and as he halted in his perplexity and gave a loose rein to the bridle, the heads of his steeds were low, and their general air of dejection seemed to express not only their own feelings but those of the rider as well.

Something must be done, however, and after a brief delay Reuben drew the reins and, speaking an encourag-

ing word to the weary animals, once more pushed forward. The pathway had long since disappeared, and he knew that he must trust the instincts of the intelligent beasts rather than his own judgment or knowledge of the way for an escape from the region. The prospect at best, however, was gloomy, and he was striving to reconcile himself to a night in the woods. In a general way he had no fear, for he felt assured that he was well within the lines of the Americans, and if by chance he should meet any one, it would be comparatively easy to explain his presence, or so it seemed to him.

He had advanced slowly a few yards, the dead branches snapping under his horses' feet, and the rough stones in the way making the ride anything but one of comfort, when in a moment three men rushed forth from the trees and, seizing the bridles, threw the horses back with such force that for a moment Reuben was almost unseated. The attack, or seizure, had been so sudden that there was no opportunity offered for even a word or an attempt to escape. In a moment he was dragged from his seat and, with an arm strongly held by each of the two men, stood facing them, while a third man as quickly seized the horses by their bridles. Not a word had as yet been spoken, and as Reuben looked keenly at his captors it was almost impossible for him to decide whether they belonged to either side in the struggle or were men after the class of Stephen Carle, the horse thief.

"Well, young man," said the oldest of the three men, a man apparently forty years of age, "what are you here for?"

The man spoke sternly, and Reuben perceived at once that much would depend upon his reply, and yet it was impossible to determine what to say. His confusion seemed to increase the suspicions of his captors, and the leader sternly repeated his question.

"I have lost my way," said Reuben, simply, at last.

"What was your way? Where were you going?"

"To Morristown," he said desperately. Some reply must be made and, aware that he was more likely to find friends than enemies in the region, he ventured to speak; but his confusion made the words tremble on his lips, and he at once perceived that he had increased the suspicions of his captors.

"Strange that you should be going to Morristown by this road. How does it happen that you are here?"

"I lost my way."

"Tom, look in the saddles," said the leader to one of his men. "'Tis not often a man starts for Morristown with two horses, and both having saddles that belong to the other side. There's some one with you! Where is the other man?" demanded the leader, sternly.

"There was no one with me. I'm all alone."

"What do you find, Tom?" inquired the leader, apparently ignoring Reuben's reply.

"I haven't found anything as yet," replied the man

who had been addressed as "Tom." "These are mighty fine saddles, though."

"What were you going to Morristown for?" demanded the leader, turning again to Reuben.

"To see General Washington."

Two of the men laughed, and even the leader smiled grimly at the words. "Now, young man," he said sharply, "that won't do! You were following us, you and the other fellow with you. You'd better tell the truth."

Reuben made no response, nor did he look up, though he could feel that the man was gazing sharply at him. There was a whispered conversation among the three men which Reuben could not hear; but in a brief time the leader turned again to him and said: "'Twill be better for you, young man, to give us the whole story. We've no time to waste here in listening to your explanations. Tell us what it means. Here you are, with two saddled horses, and all you can say is that you're on your way to Morristown and have lost your way. That won't do."

"I have told you the truth. I was going to Morristown to try to see the general, but I lost my way."

"And there was no one with you?"

"No."

"How does it happen, then, that you have two horses?"

"I stole them."

"Ah, ha! Now you're beginning to talk business. Stole them, did you? Well, you don't look like a horse thief, but one never can tell. They begin young here in the Jerseys. When did you steal them? Whose were they?"

"I don't know the names of the men."

"Oh, you don't? Well, that's lucky. Did you find them in the road? Did you knock the riders down? How did you get them?" There was a broad grin on the faces of all three men, and Reuben could see that his story was not believed.

"You can believe it or not, but I'm telling you the truth. I was somewhere back here,—at Mr. Coddington's," he said hastily. "While I was there a redcoat officer and a Hessian rode up and told Hannah—she's Mr. Coddington's daughter," he explained—"that they wanted to see her father; but she told them he wasn't there. Then they searched the house, and while they were inside, Hannah told me to take the horses. And I did," he added simply.

Either the story or the name of Mr. Coddington at once produced a change in the manner of the men, and the leader again had a low conversation with his fellows. Both his voice and manner were markedly different when he turned again and said to Reuben, "Lad, are you telling the truth?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you really want to see the general?"

"That's what I came for."

"Come with us, then. Bring the horses," added the leader, turning to his men.

As the little party moved forward through the woods, Reuben obediently going with them, the lad was completely mystified. That he was really being taken to Morristown, or to see the general, he did not for a moment believe. Morristown must be miles away, and if they intended to conduct him thither, they would not be proceeding on foot as now they were doing, he assured himself.

And yet somehow he did not lose all hope, for the manner as well as the appearance of his captors was not such as to increase his fear, though he could not decide whether they belonged to the army or not. However, there was neither time nor opportunity for questions, and though the men had been very free with those they had asked him, he well knew that if he in his turn should attempt to question them, he would receive no replies or be laughed at for his impertinence.

Silently he walked beside the leader, the other two men bringing the horses with them, and slowly they all advanced. There were no attempts to move quietly, and Reuben knew that the men must have no fear of enemies being in the vicinity, whatever the side to which they belonged. To escape was also utterly out of the question, and perplexed and yet not entirely in despair, Reuben moved on with the men; but in a few

moments all other thoughts for the moment were forgotten, as the party suddenly came to the borders of the forest, and he could see that they were standing near to a huge rock that towered high above the valley, which extended for miles before them.

Reuben instantly recognized the spot and as quickly knew that he must have turned back in his way and now was not far from his father's house. Before the war had broken out he had several times visited this place with his brothers, and the huge crag, high up on the mountain side, had been a familiar sight to all the people of the region. Indeed, it was one of the landmarks of the country, and all were familiar with the beauty of the scene which could be seen from its cliffs.

Even now, in spite of the uncertainty of his own position and the presence of the men who had captured him, the lad was impressed with the beauty of the sight which greeted his eyes. For a circuit of nearly sixty miles the country stretched before him almost as level as the floor in his father's house. Far to the left lay New York, and there were said to be times on days specially clear when the spires of that city could be discerned. In the fading light of the beautiful spring day he could see the distant waters of Newark Bay, even now sparkling in places like silver. Far in front of him he could see the place where the waters of the Raritan mingled with those of the bay at Amboy and joined the great ocean. To the right lay Brunswick town,

and farther on were the heights of Princeton, while off to the far southeast lay the plains of Monmouth and the heights of Navesink. Slowly rising curls of smoke marked the scattered homes of the people dwelling in the beautiful region, and in the soft light it seemed to Reuben as if the spot had never appeared so beautiful to him.

"You know this place, young man?" said the leader, quietly.

"Yes, I've been here before."

"It isn't very near to Morristown."

"No, I know it isn't. I lost my way and must have come back on my own tracks."

"And you wanted to see General Washington?"

"Yes, that was what I came for, though I'm afraid now, I — "

"Well, look up there, and you'll see him."

Quickly Reuben glanced in the direction indicated by the man, and on the huge arch near to the border of trees that grew to the edge of the forest, he saw three men. All were on horseback, and apparently were giving no heed to anything but the view before them. One of the men was pointing to some distant spot, and the other two were apparently striving to see something to which he had called their attention.

The man of the three nearest Reuben was mounted upon a small bay horse, which seemed all too small to bear the weight of the rider, for the man was large,—

so large that his feet came near to the ground on either side. Reuben had never beheld the great general, but from the cuts he had seen and the descriptions he had heard, he knew at once that the man at whom he was gazing was none other than the great commander himself. For a moment he gazed at him, his own heart beating more rapidly than it was wont to do, almost unmindful of all things else now. Yes, it must be he, he instantly decided, for there could be no mistaking the features and form of the man before him.

"Do you know him?" The leader was standing by Reuben's side and was evidently interested in the eagerness of the lad.

"It's Washington," said Reuben, almost in a whisper.
"It's the general."

"Right! Right the first time. Stay here and wait for me."

The man spoke pleasantly, and somehow much of Reuben's fear was now gone. Perhaps unconsciously the knowledge that the great man himself was here helped to restore a measure of confidence, but he was interested in watching the man who had just left his side. He had clambered over the rocks until he had gained the rear of the place where Washington was standing, and in a moment Reuben saw him as he emerged, and respectfully saluting and approaching the commander, at once began to speak to him. It was impossible to hear what was said, but as the general

once turned his head and glanced at him, Reuben knew the conversation concerned himself. In a brief time the man approached the border of the great rock and beckoned for Reuben to come.

Obediently the lad responded and soon joined his captor, who was altogether friendly now, and together they approached the place where General Washington was still standing. Reuben was excited, though his quiet bearing might not have betrayed it, and he was wondering what he would be asked, and what he could say in response to the questions which doubtless would be asked of him.

"The general is willing to hear what you have to say for yourself." The man at Reuben's side was speaking, but the lad gave him slight heed. He was too intent upon the one purpose in his mind now.

In a brief time they had come to the place where Washington was waiting. The man saluted as he approached, but Reuben was too deeply engrossed in his own thoughts to follow his example, even if he had understood what was expected of him. He was aware only of the presence of the commander of the American forces, and of his own inability to collect his thoughts, much less to express them coherently.

CHAPTER XIV

AGAIN AT THE COVERED BRIDGE

OF the eventful interview that followed, Reuben Denton retained only a vague and general recollection. He was embarrassed, and his replies to General Washington's questions were somewhat confused; still, though he was aware of the impression which his stammering replies must doubtless produce, he nevertheless felt that his story was believed, and that he was to be permitted to return to his father's house without any further trouble, at least as far as the Continentals were concerned.

The great general quietly, almost sympathetically, explained to him how impossible it would be for him even to attempt to arrange for an exchange for his brother Phil, and there was a note of deep sadness in his voice as he told how more of his men were prisoners of the British in New York than were with him in the camps.

"These mothers! Oh, these mothers!" Washington had said. "What can be done for them? They have it harder than even our soldiers. And yet I should almost abandon hope, were it not for the courage and

determination of the women of America. They are the patriots whom the world will sometime honor, though just now their sufferings may be known to but few besides themselves."

Reuben had listened quietly, wondering what his mother would say when he should report to her the reply of the general, and if she, too, would not display the very qualities to which the commander had just referred. In his heart he felt that she would, for his confidence in her was almost boundless.

"Lad, you have two horses, I understand."

The general was speaking again, and Reuben looked up into his face as he replied, "Yes, sir."

"You will not need both of them."

"I'll need neither of them," said Reuben, eagerly. "I have another back at Mr. Coddington's; that is, I left it there, and it's there still, I think, unless it's been found, and you might as well have both of these. I can find my way back home on foot. I know my way now, and I'll not have a bit of trouble. You can have both of them." The lad was speaking eagerly, for in the feeling of relief that had come, now that he knew his story was accepted, he was eager to show that he appreciated the kindness he had received. Besides, he knew also of the dire straits of the army, and even two horses, especially when they were as excellent as these he had secured, would be most welcome to the patriot soldiers.

"Very well, it shall be as you say. We shall take the horses, for our need is great, but you shall be paid for them if all goes well."

"I don't want any pay. They're not my horses, anyway. I just took them. They're yours just as much as they are mine."

The dim light concealed from Reuben the smile that for a moment appeared on the face of the great leader; but the offer was accepted, and in a few minutes Reuben found himself speeding down the side of the hill, rapidly making his way toward the valley, in which at a distance of only a few miles lay the home he was seeking.

His heart was light, in spite of his failure to secure a promise of aid for his brother, who was a prisoner now in Brunswick. He had not only escaped from what he had feared was a great peril, but he had also given the message and done the errand on which his mother had sent him, and that, too, without being compelled to make the long journey to Morristown.

And in addition he had been able to make a small contribution toward the equipment of the forces, for in his pride he knew that the gift, if gift it might be termed, of two horses was not to be despised. But even greater than any or all of these things was the fact that he had met General George Washington, and had even had an interview with the great man. That was something worth while, and in the pleasure of the

thought he pictured to himself what his friend Jacob would say to him when he should tell him of the adventures of the day.

In his delight he began to sing, but in a moment he checked himself as he thought of the possible perils any noise on his part might lead him into. He must give all his thought now to the journey that lay before him, and he quickly became silent, as he made his way swiftly down the hillside and soon gained the valley below. The frogs and tree-toads were now busied in their evening chorus.

The night air was soft and balmy, and the faint clouds that flitted across the face of the sky only partly concealed the light of the moon behind them. He could see all about him, and the high hills behind him stood almost like grim sentinels. There was a sense of security, of protection, not only in the barriers they presented, but also in the thought of the nearness of the men whom he had left behind him.

With a light heart Reuben ran forward as soon as he came to the roadway and, alternately running and walking, came to the long, low, covered bridge before two hours had passed. As he drew near and the outlines of the rude structure became somewhat defined in the darkness, his fears returned, as he thought of the experience which he and Jacob had had at this very spot.

He began to approach, and almost unconsciously he was listening for a repetition of the strange sounds he

had heard, and he was peering before him as if again he expected to see the body of a man disappearing through the roof of the low structure.

Cautiously he stepped upon the planks as he entered, and for a moment his heart almost seemed to rise in his throat as he heard the low, deep sound that had startled him so when Jacob had been with him. This time, however, the groan or cry was not as prolonged as it had been at the other time, nor was it repeated more than twice; but its weirdness was as marked as it had been before, and hardly aware of what he was doing, Reuben began to run swiftly, nor did his pace slacken until once more he found himself in the open air outside the bridge. He had not seen the spectre disappearing through the roof this time, but he was still nervous, and as he halted for a moment before he began the ascent of the low hill, he looked about him and listened with every sense keen and alert.

Suddenly he started, as he thought he heard the sound of voices. In a moment the sound was repeated, and Reuben knew that men were near, for there was nothing ghostly in the conversation that came to his ears. He was unable to distinguish the words, but it was evident that there were several men talking together, and from the sound he was also aware that they were approaching. His only way of escape lay back through the covered bridge, and as he hastily turned to escape by the way he had come, his fears were re-

doubled when he beheld again the figure of a man in mid-air, this time, however, descending, and not rising. But there could be no mistaking the movement, for the man could be distinctly seen, swinging back and forth, and slowly making his way to the ground, his hands grasping some invisible rope.

For a brief time Reuben was so startled, so fascinated, by the sight, that he did not move from his position, but stood watching the antics of the descending man,—if a man it really was,—that he did not hear the approach of the men, whose voices a moment before he had heard near him.

When at last he was ready to act, to his consternation he beheld three men behind him, and what was worse, it was also evident that he himself was seen. To attempt to escape by running was out of the question, and with a trembling heart the lad waited for the men to speak.

The three men approached slowly, holding their guns in their hands, and Reuben felt for a moment as if he must shout and call for help. It was still possible to run for the bridge, but the sight he had seen in the entrance had checked any such purpose in his mind. At least these three were mortal, and what the other might be Reuben Denton hardly dared to define even to himself.

In a moment the trio had drawn so near that he was able to make out their features, and with an exclamation

of delight, Reuben almost shouted as he said, "Mr. Coddington! Mr. Coddington! don't you know me?"

"It's Reuben! It's Reuben Denton," said some one, quickly.

"Is that you, Jake? Is it you, Jacob Goodnow?" demanded Reuben, eagerly, peering intently before him as he spoke.

"It's my own blessed self. That's just who it is," replied Jacob. "I reckon you know who this is, too," he added, as he pushed the third man forward.

"Why, Uncle Philemon?" exclaimed Reuben, as he recognized the third member of the party. "You here, too? I don't understand."

"We're glad to see you, Reuben," said Mr. Coddington, before the old man could reply. "You're just the man we want. Indeed, I stopped at your house for you, but they told me you had gone to Morristown and would not be back before to-morrow night."

"I did start for Morristown," replied Reuben, quickly. "Didn't you know? I stopped at your house on my way. Then you don't know about Hannah?"

"What is it about Hannah?" inquired Mr. Coddington, eagerly.

In a few words Reuben related the story of the visit of the British officer and his Hessian comrade, and told of the successful seizure of the two horses. He did not refer, however, to his meeting with the general at the huge rock, preferring to leave that until some other time.

"And Hannah was there alone with those two men?" said Mr. Coddington.

"Yes, sir."

For a moment the man was silent, though all could see that he was strongly moved; and then he said: "'Tis hard, but Hannah will have to wait. If she has suffered at their hands, nothing we could do now would aid her; and if she has not, then she will not need us. No, this business must be attended to at once."

"What business?" said Reuben. "I'll go with you; we'll all go, and we can find out, anyway, whether Hannah has been harmed or not."

"We'll attend to that later. Just now we have another duty, and you will join us, Reuben Denton, or I am greatly mistaken in you."

"What is it you want of me?" said Reuben, in a low voice.

"'Tis a serious undertaking, lad, but 'tis worth our efforts. We have heard there was a force of eight or ten Hessians from Brunswick who are now in the checkered schoolhouse over by the bend in the road. They have been carousing and drinking there for two hours, and we think we can take the whole band."

"What? With only four men?"

"Yes."

"It's all right, Reuben," said Jacob, eagerly. "We're going to trap them. We shan't have to fight, and before you know it we'll have the whole gang. Come on!"

Come along with us! We need you and every one counts. Come on, Reuben."

Jacob spoke eagerly, but Reuben was able to perceive that behind his apparent eagerness there was a nervousness that he could not conceal.

"We're wasting time here," interrupted Mr. Coddington, sharply. "Will you join us, Reuben?"

"But, Mr. Coddington," said Reuben, "I saw a strange sight just now here at the bridge," and in a few words he described his recent experiences.

Jacob and Uncle Philemon were instantly alert and were listening intently, but Mr. Coddington was silent until Reuben had told his tale, and then he said, "Wait here, all of you, while I go forward to see what I can see."

"Here, Mr. Coddington, take this with you," said Uncle Philemon, quickly, holding forth a rabbit's foot as he spoke.

"I'll not need it," and before the old man could protest, he was gone.

"He'll have trouble! He'll miss it! We may never see him again," muttered Uncle Philemon; but neither of the boys gave any heed to his words, for both were deeply interested in the result of the investigations of Mr. Coddington, who now had disappeared from sight within the shadows of the low, dark bridge.

Several minutes elapsed before Mr. Coddington rejoined the company.

"What is it? Did you find anything? What did you see?" inquired Jacob, eagerly.

"It's safe. We shall have no trouble. Come, we'll start at once," he replied.

"You are coming with us, Reuben?" he added.

"I have no gun," replied Reuben.

"Yes, I know. I have one here for you," and as he spoke Mr. Coddington handed a musket to Reuben.

"Have you one for yourself? Where did you get this?" said Reuben, as he took the gun.

"I never start on any expedition without knowing what I can depend upon," was all the reply Mr. Coddington made. "Come, we must make haste or our game will escape us."

Without a protest Reuben turned and went with the men, as they started toward the bridge. No one spoke, but the loud breathing of Jacob could be distinctly heard. Indeed, Reuben and Uncle Philemon were both apparently as strongly excited as Jacob, Mr. Coddington being the only member of the party who was calm and self-possessed.

Slowly they entered the dark bridge, but not a sound could be heard except that of their footfalls and the rippling of the stream beneath. The darkness was deep and forbidding, and Reuben was tempted to call to the leader when he was almost positive that he heard the deep breathing of some one standing in the darkness near them as they passed. But in a moment they had

gone beyond the place, and the sound could not be heard again.

As they passed out from the bridge Mr. Coddington said quietly, "That wasn't so bad, boys. We haven't suffered anything so far, and we'll trust that the same good fortune will follow us all the way to the old checkered schoolhouse."

It was a half-hour afterward when the party halted near the place they were seeking. Strange sights could be seen from the windows of the building, and sounds stranger still came forth from the open door. The Hessians evidently were there, as they had been reported to be, and the serious nature of the undertaking was now apparent to all.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

MR. CODDINGTON, who ordinarily was a man of few words and of a quiet bearing, now seemed to change completely. Reuben watched him, hardly comprehending what the change meant, for in spite of the excitement under which he was laboring, he was still deeply impressed by the coolness with which Mr. Coddington went about to arrange the details of his plan.

The sounds of hilarity from within the schoolhouse still continued, and after a brief investigation Mr. Coddington satisfied himself that no guards had been stationed outside the building. Evidently the "Dutch butchers" had no fear of an assault, and were indulging in one of the frequent "sprees" to which it was currently reported they were much given.

"That's good," said Mr. Coddington, as he returned to the place where his companions were standing, after he had made a complete circuit of the building. "They're all too busy to pay any attention to us. Now, I want you, Reuben, to go around to the other side of the schoolhouse and take your stand behind a

tree there. You, Uncle Philemon, go to the other end and do the same; and you, Jacob, stay here where you are. When you've all got you're positions, I'll go up to the door and call on the men to give themselves up. I'll shout so that you all can hear me, and I'll call on you to help, too. I want all three of you to fire your guns and yell with all the strength of your lungs, but just as soon as your guns have been fired I want you to load them again instantly and come to the front of the building, where I shall be. Everything will depend upon our boldness. I think we shall have no trouble, but whatever happens, keep cool. If we succeed, as I know we shall, why it'll be the greatest thing that has happened here in a long time, and 'twill help the cause, too. Now, if you're ready, we'll start. Be careful not to make any noise until I call for it, and then you can't make too much. Now go."

Silently and quickly Reuben and Uncle Philemon moved toward the positions they had been bidden to take. The noise from within the building increased, as the soldiers broke into a loud song, the words of which sounded strangely in Reuben's ears. The windows were barred by heavy shutters, but a light came through the cracks, which showed that the men were not in darkness.

Cautiously, and with a loudly beating heart, Reuben kept by Uncle Philemon's side until the latter had arrived at the place where he was to stand, and then

alone he crept on until he, too, had found his place at the opposite side of the building. There, taking his stand beside a huge chestnut tree, he cocked his gun and waited for the signal.

The words of the song of the half-drunken soldiers still could be heard breaking in harshly upon the stillness of the warm evening. Occasionally some one more eager than his fellows would attempt to outdo his companions, and the stentorian tones would be followed by shouts of laughter, and then the song would be resumed. Reuben was in a state of nervous fear, and yet outwardly he was still calm. He did not move from his position, still standing with the gun tightly grasped in his hands. He was leaning forward, far more intent upon hearing the voice of Mr. Coddington than he was upon the noise that came from within the building.

The slow moments passed, and still the signal was not given. It seemed to Reuben that a half-hour must have elapsed, though in reality it had been but a few minutes since he had left his fellows. He wondered what Jacob was doing, and if Uncle Philemon had found a charm which would be able to shield him from a Hessian bullet. The thought suggested the possibility of the soldiers making an attack, and hardly aware of what he was doing, he glanced behind him to make sure of a way of escape. A loud whirring of the wings of some large bird so startled him that he almost pressed his finger upon the trigger of his gun, but in a

moment he heard the shrill cry of a screech owl and knew that he had been needlessly alarmed.

Still he waited and watched, but save for the mournful sound of the cry of the owl and the boisterous shouts from within the schoolhouse, nothing could be heard. Perhaps the project had been abandoned and Mr. Coddington had decided that an attack was not feasible. At the thought Reuben started forward, but he instantly checked himself, as suddenly the song of the Hessians abruptly ceased. Indeed, so sharp was the break that the silence which followed was of itself oppressive, but in a moment the loud words of Mr. Coddington came as a sharp relief.

"Surrender, every one of you!" he shouted. "You're surrounded by my men and are, all of you, my prisoners. Keep your seats, and the first one that dares to move toward the guns will be shot. Do you hear me, my good fellows?" he shouted, in still louder tones.

In response came the shots of the three men waiting outside, and these were instantly followed by such yells as Reuben thought he never before had heard. He himself was shouting with such ardor that had there been three instead of one making the noise, he felt assured that they could not have produced a greater commotion. Within the schoolhouse, however, no noise could be heard.

Hastily Reuben reloaded his gun, and still shouting in his loudest tones, ran swiftly to the front door of the

building and joined Jacob and Mr. Coddington, who were already there. A moment later Uncle Philemon also came, and the shouts and calls were redoubled in volume.

"Silence, there!" called Mr. Coddington, sharply, pretending to speak to some invisible force behind the three who had joined him. "Keep close to me," he added, in a low voice, quickly, speaking to his friends; then turning to the astounded soldiers he said sternly, "Stand up, every one of you."

Some of the men were already upon their feet, and as a few evidently understood the words that were spoken to them, they repeated them to their comrades, and the entire body rose. In spite of his own strong excitement Reuben gazed intently at the men before them.

Flushed with drink, almost stupefied by the sharp and unexpected summons, clad in their heavy and strange garb, they presented a sight that under other circumstances might have caused Reuben to laugh heartily. They resembled a flock of sheep gazing curiously at some object that had alarmed them. But the lad had no desire to laugh, for the scene was too intensely dramatic for him even to feel the slightest inclination. If they should make an onslaught, there would be no opportunity to escape, and the consequences would afford no opportunity for mirth, unless it was for the Hessian soldiers themselves. But the men were apparently so

dazed that the thought of offering any resistance evidently had not occurred to them. They had heard the reports of the guns, and the shouts and calls that had arisen from every side of the building, and now directly before them they could see four armed men filling the doorway, and the leader had addressed they knew not how many men who supposedly were behind them. The men of Hesse were not wanting in personal bravery, but in the present instance resistance to this large and concealed force would be worse than useless.

Stolidly they gazed at the men before them as they all stood, not one venturing to make a movement toward the guns, that had been placed against the walls. The very boldness of Mr. Coddington impressed them as being born of a confidence that could have no other foundation than security in a large force with him.

Bidding his companions retain the places they were holding in the doorway, Mr. Coddington stepped inside the room and sternly ordered the Hessians nearest him to advance. The motion of his hands was understood, though his words may not have been, and two of the fifteen men in the company stepped forward. Leathern thongs had been brought by Mr. Coddington, and at his word the hands of the two were quickly bound behind them and to one another, and then they were led outside to the supposedly greater force awaiting them. By twos the men all approached and were treated in a similar manner, until the entire band had been secured.

Then the energy of Mr. Coddington began to display itself still further. In a few sharp words he ordered the prisoners to form in line, and as they took their positions he turned to Reuben and said quickly, "You'll have to stay here, lad, and look after the guns until we come back."

"Where are you going?" inquired Reuben, blankly.

"We'll take these fellows to Bound Brook. If we have no mishap we'll not be gone but a few hours; and just as soon as we've turned them over to the authorities there, we'll come back here. Meanwhile you would do well to put out these candles and keep a watch over the guns, for they'll all be needed."

"I'll stay," said Reuben, simply, though his heart sank as he thought of the people waiting in his home for the word he was to bring them.

"That's right. You'll have no trouble. We'll be back by midnight or soon after," said Mr. Coddington, hurriedly. Then turning to the others, he gave the word, and the march to Bound Brook was begun.

The prisoners moved off slowly, still offering no resistance and apparently still failing to comprehend what the strange occurrence meant to them. Reuben remained standing in front of the schoolhouse until the figures of the departing men mingled with the shadows of the great trees and were lost to sight. Then he turned quickly, and entering the building, hastily extinguished the lights, and satisfying himself

that all had been done that lay in his power, he closed the front door, and seating himself on the floor with his back against the wall, prepared to wait for the return of his companions.

For a time the excitement under which he had been laboring still continued, and as he thought over the results which had attended the scheme of Mr. Codding-ton he was strangely elated. What a report it would be that he could make to his father and mother! Even his father must be stirred by the capture. A little band of four succeeding in taking a force four times their number—why, nothing like it had been heard of in the history of the colony! And it had been done so easily and without a struggle. Not even a gun, save those that had been discharged outside the building, had been fired, and no one on either side had been injured. It surely was a marvellous feat, and even General Washington would be pleased when he should hear of it, as doubtless he would soon.

From thinking of the capture, Reuben's mind reverted to Hannah and the predicament in which she had been left when he had fled from her home with the two horses he had seized. Even the success which had attended his efforts was not sufficient to banish his uneasiness when he thought of the peril in which she had been left. He wondered what the men had said when they found that their horses were gone, and if they had visited their anger upon the resolute

girl who had insisted that he should do what he had done.

His uneasiness increased as he thought of her, and deciding that he could return to his own home as soon if he should stop first at Mr. Coddington's and secure his horse, as he could if he should start directly for his father's house, he decided that he would go back with his friend when he should return from Bound Brook. Besides, he would be able to learn what had befallen Hannah, and with the decision made he felt more at ease. Indeed, the feeling of comfort soon increased, and, wearied as he was by the exciting experiences of the day, his head was soon nodding, and when a few minutes had passed, Reuben was soundly sleeping, though he still retained his place on the floor and sat with his head leaning back against the wall, his gun resting in his lap.

How long he had been asleep he had no means of knowing, but he was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices. His first thought was that his friends had returned, and he started to rise to his feet, but in a moment he desisted and began to listen intently. There were two of the men, and they were standing directly in front of the door of the schoolhouse. They were speaking in such low tones that he was unable to hear much of their conversation, but the word "bridge" had at once aroused him, and he leaned forward, not daring to change his position.

"I wonder if the old schoolhouse is closed," he heard one of the men say. "'Twould be better to go inside if we can."

"I don't know. I agreed to meet him here," he heard the other reply. "You might see," the man added. "I don't believe we shall be interrupted here where we are, but 'twill be more comfortable inside."

There was a movement of the men as they approached the door, and with a sinking of his heart Reuben realized that he had neglected to fasten it when he had entered. How could he have been so careless, and what would Mr. Coddington say when he should learn of his neglect? And he had been left to see that the guns should be guarded, too!

In a moment the door was slowly and cautiously opened, and Reuben could see in the dim light the forms of two men in the doorway. As soon as they were within, the door was closed again and the dense darkness returned. Reuben crouched more closely against the wall, fearful that even his breathing would betray his presence to the newcomers.

One of the men stumbled against one of the muskets that was leaning against the wall, and as it fell, it struck others in the line, until the sound of falling guns passed around one side of the room. Both men uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise and then became silent, though Reuben knew they were startled and were listening intently. Unable to endure the strain,

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the lad in a mad desire to flee from the place sprang to his feet, and made a rush for the door; but as he opened it, both men sprang upon him and with one long call for help Reuben was borne to the floor and lay helpless in the grasp of his unknown captors.

CHAPTER XVI

A DISCOVERY

FOR some reason which Reuben could not have explained even to himself, he had made but the one outcry during the unexpected attack that had been made upon him. He had exerted all the strength he possessed, but in a moment had been borne to the floor, and his struggles were ended. Across his body and peering down into his face lay one of the men who had seized him, and in the dim light Reuben was startled as he recognized his captor as Abraham Patten.

In spite of his danger, a mad, almost ungovernable, rage seized upon him. Who was this man, of whom he had knowledge that even Mr. Coddington had begged him to keep to himself, to seize him now and treat him as brutally as he was being treated? Unmindful of his promise, forgetful of his own peril, Reuben glared up into the face so near his own, and said:—

“I know you! You’re Abraham Patten! If you don’t get up and let me go, I’ll go straight and tell about the old covered bridge.”

Just how Reuben was to go or how he was to carry out his threat apparently did not occur to him, though

his position was not such as to warrant any undue confidence on his part. But not even he was prepared for the instantaneous effect of the words he had uttered.

Abraham Patten — for it was he — quickly raised himself, and still grasping the hands of his captive, yanked him roughly to his feet as he peered intently into his face.

"Who are you? What do you know?" he demanded savagely.

"I know you," retorted Reuben, angrily, and quick to see that he had produced a strong impression upon the mind of the man.

"Come here, Tom," said Abraham Patten to his companion. "See if you know who this young chap is. I vow," he added suddenly, "I know who it is. It's young Denton. Isn't that your name?" he demanded sharply.

"That's my name," Reuben responded.

"What in the name of —" The man stopped abruptly as if words had failed him. "Are there any others hereabouts? Are you alone?" he inquired.

"You won't have to ask that question many times. You'll soon find out," said Reuben, whose anger was still keen, though he could readily perceive that the man before him was strongly agitated.

"Where is Mr. Coddington?" demanded Abraham Patten.

"Gone to Bound Brook."

"Is he coming back here?"

"You'll soon know."

"Come, young man, speak up and tell me the truth! There's more than you know depending upon your words. Tell me exactly where he is, and if he is coming back here to-night! Did he leave no word for me?"

"He didn't leave any word for you," replied Reuben, his anger for some reason disappearing, and his feeling for the man before him undergoing a change.

"Is he coming back here?" demanded Abraham Patten again.

"He expected to when he went away."

"What are these guns here? Whose are they?"

Reuben hesitated, not being fully persuaded that he ought to disclose all he knew, for he was still suspicious of this unaccountable man whom he had first seen clad in the uniform of a British soldier in Mr. Coddington's house.

"Mr. Coddington can tell you if you see him."

"And he is coming back here?"

"I told you that he expected to. If he doesn't have any trouble, he ought to be here by midnight."

"Trouble? What trouble should he have? What do you mean?"

"He was taking some prisoners to Bound Brook."

"Prisoners? You speak in riddles, young man. Tell me what you mean."

Abraham Patten spoke sternly, and his grasp of

Reuben's hands was relaxed. The lad could have broken away, and in the darkness soon have distanced his pursuers if the men had followed him. But somehow now he had no inclination to run, and besides, there were the clear instructions of Mr. Coddington for him to stay until such a time as he himself should return.

"Yes, he had some prisoners," he said quietly.

"How many? Who were they? What were they?" demanded Abraham Patten, eagerly.

"Hessians."

"Hessians? How many were there? How did he take them?"

"There were more than a dozen," said Reuben, quietly, though he was enjoying the excitement which plainly possessed both men before him.

"I wish you would explain yourself, young man."

"Why, there were a dozen or more Hessians here in the schoolhouse, and Mr. Coddington and three others came and captured every one of them."

"Don't you believe him, Abraham," said his companion. "The best thing we can do is to tie the young fellow up and leave him here. My opinion is that the best thing we can do is to get away from here. You can see Coddington at the bridge—"

"Hush!" interrupted Abraham Patten, sternly. "The young man has told us the truth, and the best thing we can do is to stay here till Mr. Coddington comes back."

If you have not told me the truth," he added sharply, turning to Reuben as he spoke, "it will be the worse for you. Come, we'll go inside the schoolhouse and wait for a time."

At his word the three men withdrew into the building, the door of which was then closed and this time securely fastened. Abraham Patten seated himself with his back against the door, and then all three lapsed into silence. The slow moments passed, and the silence that rested over all was unbroken. For a time Reuben's thoughts were busied with the exciting experiences through which he had passed, and he puzzled himself trying to find some clew to the strange actions of Abraham Patten. That the man appeared to be friendly toward Mr. Coddington was evident, and it was equally true that Mr. Coddington had a very friendly feeling for him.

But his own recent rough treatment at the hands of the man and his companion was still too fresh in Reuben's mind for him to forget it, and at times his feeling of anger blazed forth afresh. Then he thought of Mr. Coddington and Jacob and of the possibility of their having met with trouble with their prisoners on the way to Bound Brook. If anything should occur to prevent their return to the schoolhouse, his own troubles with the two men who had taken him would be enlarged. The entire problem was confusing, perplexing, and thinking upon it, Reuben fell asleep. He was awak-

ened by the men who were with him moving about in the room. He heard them approach the door, and then became aware that some one was also outside the door. There were a few whispered words spoken and then the rough wooden latch was lifted.

"Reuben," called Mr. Coddington, in a low voice, for the lad recognized the voice of his friend.

Before he could respond Abraham Patten in a whisper bade him be silent, and then he himself in a whisper spoke to those outside.

"Seventeen hundred," he said.

"Seventy-six," responded the man on the opposite side of the door.

In a moment the door was flung open, and Mr. Coddington and Jacob entered.

"I didn't know you were here, Abraham," said Mr. Coddington, in a tone that indicated his surprise.

"You ought to have known. I sent you word that I would meet you here."

"By whom?"

Reuben could not hear the name that was given in the reply, and then for a few minutes the two men conversed in low tones, and Reuben was not able to hear what was said, though in his eagerness he did his utmost. In a brief time Mr. Coddington turned to Reuben and said:—

"You need not stay longer, lad. We'll look after these guns. By the way, Reuben, you need have no

fears for the folks at home. We saw your father at Bound Brook."

"You did? He hadn't heard anything more of Phil, had he?"

"No; only that he surely was taken to Brunswick."

"And you told him of my seeing the General?"

"Yes. He knows," responded Mr. Coddington, quietly. "He's at home long before this, and your mother now knows all about it."

"When are you going home, Mr. Coddington?"

"Not before noon."

"What time is it now?"

"About an hour before sunrise."

"Is Jacob going with me?"

"Yes. There's no necessity for either of you to stay any longer. We've done our work for the night."

"Where's Uncle Philemon?"

"He left us away back by the covered bridge. He's home before this, I think."

"The covered bridge? Did Uncle Philemon go home that way?"

"Yes; why not?"

"I — I didn't think he'd do that," replied Reuben, in some confusion, as he thought of the threat he had made to Abraham Patten. He wished heartily now that he had not spoken as he had, and was somewhat troubled as to what Mr. Coddington would say when he should

hear of his reference to what he had virtually promised he would keep to himself.

"Philemon will have no trouble at the old bridge if he attends strictly to his own affairs," said Mr. Coddington, significantly. "In fact, I think that is a safe rule for every one everywhere. Good night, Reuben," he added; "I do not think that you and Jacob need delay any longer."

The hint was certainly explicit, and Reuben and Jacob at once departed from the schoolhouse. The darkness was still deep over the land, and in the recollection of the exciting experiences of the night, neither of the boys was inclined to be reckless. They spoke in low whispers, and then only to relate to each other the experiences that had come to them. Jacob was made somewhat angry as Reuben related to him the story of the rough treatment he had received at the hands of Abraham Patten and his unknown companion, and even Reuben's anger threatened to break out again as he thought of what he had endured.

But there was another thought in Reuben's mind that in a measure tended to banish even the grievance he was cherishing, and that was that Hannah Coddington had been left alone with the British officer and the Hessian and no one had gone there to inquire as to her safety. Even her own father had appeared to be somewhat unmindful of her, or so Reuben believed, and had made no plans to return before noon of the approaching day.

To Reuben such neglect seemed almost criminal, and he was in no way able to reconcile it with the courtesy and carefulness that marked the ordinary dealings of Hannah Coddington's father. That the two men were still in the house seemed nowise likely, but as Reuben thought over the matter, more and more he became anxious to learn how it had fared with the fearless girl.

The feeling became so strong that when he and Jacob arrived at the fork in the road, he said, "Jake, I think I'll go over and see how Hannah has gotten along." He had already related the story of the occurrences there to his friend, and they had discussed their probable outcome.

"I'll go with you," said Jacob, firmly. "If the men are there, we may not be able to do anything, but we can find out, anyway. Come on."

"You don't have to go," said Reuben.

"I know that. If you don't want me to—" began Jacob.

"Come along, Jake. You know I want you," said Reuben, heartily, and the two boys turned at once into the road that would lead toward Mr. Coddington's house.

The dawn was now upon them, and in the coming light their courage somewhat revived. There was a fragrance in the air that was itself inspiring, and the melody of the songs of the birds that rose now on every

side also served to soothe the feelings of the wearied boys. The night had been a hard one, but in the presence of the coming day even their weariness itself in a measure was forgotten or ignored.

In a half-hour they had gained the summit of the hill from which the abode of Mr. Coddington could be seen in the distance. The light was now clear, for the sun had appeared above the eastern horizon. The boys were hungry as well as eager, and in the thought of the breakfast they could secure, both were increasing their speed and were walking rapidly over the rough roadway.

Suddenly Jacob stopped, and seizing Reuben by the arm, pointed before them as he said, "Reuben, what's that ahead there?"

Reuben glanced in the direction indicated by his friend, and in a moment said: "It's a soldier, Jacob! It's a Hessian! No, there's two of them; one is walking right behind the other. Come into the bushes here till they pass us. We haven't been seen, I'm sure. Come on! Come on!"

Instantly the boys darted into the bushes that grew close to the roadside, in their excitement making noise that would have betrayed them under other circumstances, and then crouching, peered out at the approaching men. Soon they came nearer, and to the astonishment of the boys they perceived that the arms of the Hessian were tightly bound behind him, and following closely in

his footsteps was a young lad holding a gun in his hands.

Reuben Denton's astonishment was sublime when a moment afterwards he recognized in the supposed farmer boy Hannah Coddington herself, and in his surprise he uttered an exclamation which instantly caused Hannah to glance timidly toward the place of their hiding.

CHAPTER XVII

HANNAH CODDINGTON'S PRISONER

AS Reuben and his companion stepped forth from the bushes in which they had concealed themselves, the surprise of the boys was even greater than the alarm Hannah had betrayed. The Hessian had stopped and was gazing stupidly at them, and his bleared eyes and silly expression at once disclosed the condition in which he was. As for Hannah Coddington, her fear had soon given way to a feeling of confusion, and for the first time in his life Reuben saw her evidently at a complete loss for words.

Her face was scarlet and there were traces of tears in her eyes ; and Reuben was moved alike by a feeling of compassion and surprise as he said: "Hannah, what does this mean? Who is this man? What are you doing with him? Why are his hands tied behind his back?"

"He's my prisoner," retorted Hannah, with a pathetic attempt at boldness.

"Prisoner? I don't understand."

"Why, the way of it was like this," said Hannah, striving vainly to keep back the tears. "He is one of those two men who came to our house yesterday when you

were there, Reuben. After you had gone and they found out that their horses had been taken, they were very angry, and at first they threatened me with all kinds of harm. I don't think they believed me to be very badly frightened," and as the resolute girl spoke, for a moment there was a flash in her eyes that reminded Reuben of the spirit she was wont to display, though now it was accompanied by a trembling of the lips that was pathetic in its appeal. "At all events, I tried to seem bold, though I never was more frightened in all my life. Well, after a time, and when they found that they couldn't really do anything to get their own horses back, they searched our place all over."

"Did they find my horse?" interrupted Reuben, eagerly.

"No. Your horse is still out there in the woods where you left it, or it was last night. I haven't seen it this morning. The officer only waited a little while, and then he went away, leaving this Hessian there." And Hannah glanced at the soldier, who was staring stupidly at the group as if he still failed to comprehend what the delay meant. "I expected every hour that some more would come, but no one did. Last night I was afraid, and I bolted the door in my room. This man began to sing and shout in the night, and though I was terribly frightened, for my father didn't come, I waited and waited.

"I don't think I slept any all night long, but when it began to be light I crept out of my room and went down-

stairs and crept to the room where this man was. He was asleep on the floor and breathing so hard that even if the room had not been filled with the smell of the stuff he had had in a big bottle which he had spilled all over him and the floor, too, I should have known what the trouble was."

Hannah could not repress the shudder of disgust that crept over her as she spoke and glanced at the stupid man before them. In a moment she resumed her story, and said, "All at once it occurred to me that I could get rid of him by taking him to Bound Brook. I knew I couldn't do anything unless I did it right away, so I ran back up the stairs and — and — I — I — put on my father's clothes — "

Here Hannah paused, and though her appearance at any other time might have made Reuben and Jacob laugh heartily,—for the garb she wore was much too large for her and her entire appearance under other circumstances would certainly have been called ludicrous,—her earnestness and the embarrassment under which she so evidently was suffering, checked any such tendency on the part of her hearers, and Reuben said gently:—

"What did you do then, Hannah?"

"Why, I took a strap and a gun and went downstairs again. It almost made me sick when I came to the place where he—the beast!—was lying, but he didn't stir, and in a minute I got my courage up again. I first took

hold of one of his ugly hands and then when I found that he didn't wake up, I turned him over on his side and tied both his hands together. Then I took the gun again and called to him to get up, but he didn't stir. For just a minute I didn't know but I would do better to keep him shut up there in the house until my father came back, but when I thought that perhaps the officer would be there again this morning and some more men with him, I decided that I wouldn't wait, but would try to take him to Bound Brook myself. So I called to him, and called to him, but he didn't stir, the beast!"

"How did you get him started?"

"Why, at last, when I found that I couldn't wake him up by calling to him, I went out to the well and got a blickey [bucket] full of cold water and then went in and poured it all over his face."

"Did he wake up?" inquired Jacob, with a laugh.

"He did," replied Hannah, sharply, "but at first he didn't intend to go with me. I had to be real hard with him before I could get him to start."

"How did you manage it?"

"I made him. I just made him. This gun has a bayonet, as you see, and when the Dutch butcher really saw at last that I was in earnest and that something was likely to happen to him if he didn't pay attention to me, he did what I told him to. And here we are," she added simply.

"That was a great trick, Hannah," exclaimed Jacob,

delightedly. "I don't believe there's another girl in Jersey that would dare do it."

"I didn't dare. I just had to," replied Hannah.

"Jacob," said Reuben, who had been thoughtful and silent for a moment, "you go back with Hannah, and I'll take this man to Bound Brook myself."

"I wish you would both go," said Hannah, eagerly.

"No. Jacob can go home with you and get my horse and bring it around to my house, and I'll take the Dutchman."

"Well, you wait here, Jacob Goodnow!" said Hannah, sharply. "You stay right here for half an hour, and then you can come and get Reuben's horse."

"I'll do it. I'll do just what you tell me to, Hannah," said Jacob.

"You'd better," retorted the girl, as she darted into the woods and speedily disappeared from sight as she took a shorter path than the highway afforded toward her father's house. There were also other reasons that induced Hannah to depart at once, though Jacob was inclined to laugh when she was gone at the ludicrous sight she had presented when clothed in her father's garb. Reuben was far too eager, to share in his friend's hilarity. After giving Jacob some instructions, he at once ordered the helpless prisoner to start, and in a brief time, Reuben marching closely behind the Hessian, they departed.

The man apparently was not inclined to offer any

resistance. Indeed, his manner and bearing were that of entire indifference, but Reuben was aware that this was probably due more to the man's condition than to any deeper motive he might have. When he had recovered more completely from the debauch which had placed him in his present predicament, an entirely different aspect might be presented.

Accordingly, Reuben urged him to increased speed, eager to arrive at Bound Brook before any trouble might arise; but do what he might, the huge soldier kept steadily to the pace at which he was going. He did not offer any resistance nor did he threaten any rebellion. Indeed, that would hardly have been expected of a man having his hands tightly bound behind his back, and a boy with a loaded musket marching closely in his rear; but neither did he increase his speed, no matter how eagerly Reuben called upon him.

After a brief time Reuben perceived that his efforts were useless, and striving to be content, followed the man steadily mile after mile. The sun was now well up in the eastern sky, and Reuben, who had eaten nothing since the preceding night, was beginning to feel ravenously hungry, but there was nothing to be had until they should arrive at the camp of the Americans. Not even did he dare to stop for a drink of cool water at any of the numerous springs they passed, for Hannah Coddington's prisoner must be safely delivered at all hazards.

Reuben noted the great size and strange dress of the man before him. A huge fur hat, standing at least a foot and a half high, crowned the head. The long heavy mustache, so strange and fierce in appearance to the smoothly shaven people of the colonies, had not received its customary morning coat of shoe blacking, and so appeared strangely faded, though it still lent an aspect of fierceness to the man's face. The high jack-boots, coming well up to the thighs, were also strange, and the clanking of the heavy, cruel-looking spurs that had been adjusted to each foot, sounded with every step. The heavy short broadsword, the huge pistols, and carbines with which every Hessian soldier was supplied had been removed from his person by Hannah when she had secured the man, but still in spite of his apparently defenceless condition, Reuben well knew that his prisoner was possessed of great strength, and if he should once be able to use his hands, would be an antagonist of no mean power if he should strive to regain his liberty.

But thus far the man had been as docile as a child, and the steady, monotonous sound of their footfalls was unbroken.

By this time they had entered a stretch of the road that led through a ravine or deep gully that the rains of many years had worn deep into the hillside. The huge chestnut trees grew close to the roadway, and as the sunlight seldom penetrated the forest here, the prevailing air was one of gloom. The air itself was heavy

with dampness, and even the songs of the birds were limited to the shrill musical call of a wood thrush deep in the forest beyond.

To all appearances the Hessian was completely indifferent to his surroundings, and the sunshine and the shade were both alike to him. Stolidly, steadily, he moved forward, and Reuben followed, glancing now apprehensively about him as the path led through a denser part of the forest. Across the road the trickling waters of an overflowing spring made their way, leaving slippery stones and little pools in places. The rich color of the soil was almost bloodlike in its appearance here, and even the mud which clung to both men as they splashed on their way through the place had a decidedly sanguinary hue.

Familiar as Reuben was with the prevailing tint of all the soil in the region, he was nevertheless impressed by the appearance of the ground over which they were passing.

As they came out from the soft place and approached the higher ground, the banks of the defile were also higher and steeper, and as they entered the gully, Reuben glanced carefully at the flint in the lock of his gun. Bending forward as he did, he was not able to see two men who now were close behind him. One of them was clad in the scarlet uniform of the British, but his companion presented only the appearance of an ordinary Jersey farmer.

Stealthily the men followed, occasionally stopping and seeking the shelter of the trees and then again running swiftly along the road, following closely and still more closely upon the men before them. While Reuben and the Hessian had been passing the spring, the two men had passed around through the woods and now were lying quietly on the banks of the gully through which the lad was certain to pass, waiting for him to come. Seldom had they spoken, and then only in whispers, and now one had laid aside his gun and bared his arms, while the other was holding his gun in readiness for instant use.

It may have been that Reuben felt some premonition of peril, and that of itself may have caused him to look again to his flint, but while his head was bowed he was passing directly beneath the two men who were lying on the bank. Suddenly one of them flung himself down and fell upon Reuben's back, and the lad was borne to the ground. For a moment he struggled desperately, but the other man quickly joined his comrade, while the Hessian, at last aware of what was going on, added his kicks to the efforts of the men, and in a moment Reuben's hands were bound behind his back and he lay helpless before his captors.

"Get up, lad," said one of the men, roughly, grasping him by the shoulder and assisting him to stand as he spoke.

Looking into his eyes, Reuben recognized the man as

Stephen Carle. "You know me, I see," said the horse thief. "Well, we'll become better acquainted still, I hope. Here, none of that," he added savagely to the Hessian, whose hands now having been freed, had made a vicious lunge at the helpless lad. For a moment Stephen conversed in low tones with his companion, who shook his head vigorously at the suggestion, whatever it was that was said, and then turning again to Reuben said, "Come on. You go with us."

"Where?" inquired Reuben.

Stephen laughed, but made no response, and in a few minutes the party of four were in the road once more. Frequently they stopped and listened intently, but each time they resumed their journey. At last they came in sight of the old covered bridge, and as they left the main road and turned toward it, Reuben knew that doubtless they would cross and take the road to the right, which would lead toward Brunswick.

It was noon now, and not having tasted of food for many hours, and wearied with the march, the shade of the long bridge was doubly grateful to Reuben as they entered. Stephen Carle moved swiftly in advance of all, and even crossed to the opposite side before the others had gained the middle of the bridge. But when he returned, in a moment his excitement was evident to all, and after a hasty word with his companion, he instantly clambered up one of the posts of the bridge, and finding a long strap there, evidently the object of

his search, he dropped it to the floor. Swiftly following, he cut the thongs that bound Reuben's hands, and then his companion hastily climbed up the strap and disappeared through what Reuben could now see was very like a trap-door.

"Up you go," said Stephen, sharply.

Helpless, aware that he could offer no resistance, Reuben quickly grasped the strap as he had been bidden, and he too passed up through the trap-door in the under side of the covering of the old bridge.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE OLD BRIDGE

R EUBEN DENTON looked about him when he had taken his place among the men who had preceded him, with an interest that even the fear that possessed him could not entirely dispel. It was a low room which had been finished off with a few rough boards between the cross timbers of the bridge and the roof that covered all.

In one corner he perceived two or three blankets, so placed that at once he knew they had served as a bed for some one. Though the light was dim, nevertheless, he was able to see clearly all about him, and as he recalled the many strange sights he had seen in the place within the past few weeks, there flashed into his mind the conviction that now he had found a clew, if not the entire solution, to the mystery which had so greatly frightened Uncle Philemon, and had perplexed himself and Jacob Goodnow.

There still remained some things that were not explained, but in the conviction that a part of the mystery at least was now made clear, he looked eagerly into the faces of the men who were his captors. The knowledge,

however, had come to him too late to be of any service, and his very helplessness only served to deepen his feeling of despair. Stephen Carle and his companion were conversing in whispers, and Reuben was unable to hear a word that was said.

The Hessian soldier, still stolid and apparently indifferent to all that was going on, had seated himself on the floor, with his back against the side of the small room. As he filled and prepared to light his pipe, a sharp word from Stephen Carle caused him to desist, but the expression upon his face was unaltered. Apparently no one was mindful of Reuben, and the lad was left to himself, though he was well aware that he was helpless in the hands of his captors.

The sound of some one on the bridge below instantly caused Stephen Carle and his comrade to cease their whispered conversation, and stretching themselves upon the floor, they peered through the cracks at the man below. It was a man on horseback who was passing, but either he was of no special interest to the watchers, or they feared to make their presence known to him. At all events, he was permitted to pass on without molestation, and in a brief time the men resumed their interrupted conversation. Apparently there was a very pronounced difference of opinion between them, for Reuben could see that Stephen was becoming angry. Strive as he might, however, he was unable to hear enough of what was said to give him any clew as to

their plans or intentions concerning him. To all appearances, his presence was completely ignored, and he was satisfied that whatever the subject of the conversation might be, it had no reference to the disposal that was to be made of himself.

When an hour, or what Reuben concluded must be that length of time, had elapsed, the soldier spoke in a low voice to the Hessian, and then, after listening intently for a moment, the trap-door was opened, another long strap was lowered, and the soldier descended to the floor of the bridge. The Hessian followed, but so clumsy were his efforts that instead of sliding down the strap he almost fell the entire distance, and struck the planks with a noise that could have been heard at a considerable distance away.

An exclamation of anger escaped Stephen Carle's lips, and he, with the men below, waited a brief time in sharp suspense, the fear of discovery evidently being strong upon them all. Reuben, too, was intently listening, though the feeling in his heart was far different from that in the minds of the others. However, it was soon evident that no one had heard the fall of the Hessian, and with a sigh of relief, Stephen Carle hastily drew up the strap, and once more closed the trap-door.

Reuben was now alone with the man who had stolen his father's horses, and as his knowledge of him was sufficient to make him realize the reckless nature of his

captor, his mind was in no wise relieved. Indeed, for the moment his fears increased, and he heartily wished that they had departed with the others.

For a time Stephen Carle did not speak, but sat on the trap-door itself, busying himself in polishing a huge horse-pistol which seemed to be the object of his special pride. At last, unable to endure the strain longer, Reuben said, "What are you going to do with me, Steve?"

"Take you to Brunswick," responded Stephen Carle, with a leer on his face as he spoke.

"What for?"

"What do they usually take the rebels there for, anyway? You ought to know already, but if you don't, you can ask your brother Phil when you get there. He ought to be able to give you some information, seein' as how he's had considerable experience already, an' is likely to have some more soon."

"What do you mean?" inquired Reuben, anxiously.

"Jest what I say," replied Stephen Carle, with a brutal laugh, though he took pains that the sound of it might not be heard far away.

"Am I to be a prisoner just as Phil is?"

"That's it. That's it exactly."

"But I'm not a soldier. I'm not in the army."

"What was you doin' with that Dutchman then?" inquired Stephen Carle, sharply.

"I was taking him for some one else to Bound Brook."

"Takin' him for some one else? Didn't ye know who he was? Who an' what d'ye think he was? King George?"

"I mean I didn't take him. Some one else took him."

"I thought ye said jest now that ye was takin' him."

"I meant capture him. Some one else made him a prisoner, and I was just taking him to Bound Brook for her."

"For *her*! That's a good one," laughed Stephen.
"Who was it took him? Your marm?"

Reuben made no response, for he had no thought of betraying Hannah, and he well knew now that anything he might say would have no effect upon the man before him. And yet was there not something that would appeal to him? A sudden thought had occurred to Reuben, and looking up again into Stephen Carle's face, he said eagerly: "Steve, you're not a soldier, either. You're no more a redcoat than I am a Jersey Blue."

"I'm not so sure o' that."

"You haven't enlisted, have you, Steve?"

"Depends on how you look at it. Some folks might think I had, and then again some might think I hadn't. For myself I'm perfectly willin' to let 'em all think jest as they please. I don't know as it affects me very much one way or the other."

"But, Steve, what I mean is that you're not a regular.

You're not enlisted, and it won't make any difference to you whether you take me to Brunswick or — or — let me go."

Stephen Carle made no response, though Reuben could see that his little eyes were peering intently at him. Assured that he had touched a responsive chord, Reuben continued: "Now, Steve, I know just as well as you do that you don't really care. All you want is what you can make out of this trouble."

"That's all any of 'em want. Just look at the rebels, will you? The most of 'em haven't a shilling in the world, and they're fighting for what they can get, or hope to get, which is another matter, as likely as not they'll find out some day sooner or later. Then look at the Tories. Why, the most of 'em are folks that have got some kind o' property, an' they're desperately afraid that if they don't stand by the King, the other fellows will step in and get all they have saved up themselves. Makes me think o' two dogs I saw over in Brunswick th' other day. They was both fightin' over a bone one o' 'em had found an' the other wanted. Finally, they got so warmed up they both o' 'em forgot all about the bone, an' was goin' for each other like all possessed. Well, while they was fightin' like — like brothers, another dog come up and just ran off with the bone. He got the bone and never a scratch. Well, I'm like that 'ere dog. While the redcoats an' the rebels is fightin' an' tryin' desperately to get one another

by the throat, I just run in an' carried off the bone. See, don't ye?"

"No, I don't see," retorted Reuben, angrily.

"Not quite so loud, if you please," responded Stephen Carle, warningly.

Reuben obediently lowered his tone as he said: "No, I don't see it at all, Steve; and you know it isn't so. Lots of these men have given up everything they have for the sake of the liberty of the colonies. Look at Washington and Livingstone and Maxwell and—and—I don't know how many more."

"Don't ye believe it! No, sir-e-e-e! Don't ye believe it for a minute! I'm tellin' ye it's every man for himself, an' in my way I'm only doin' what every other man in his way is tryin' to do, too. Only," he added, "some o' 'em haven't succeeded quite's well as I have."

"What's Washington trying to get? What can he hope for?"

"Washington? Oh, he's doin' his prettiest 'cause he wants to be king."

"I don't believe it!"

"Nobody's goin' to compel ye to, but it's true, whether ye believe it or not."

"Well, Steve, what'll you take to let me go?" inquired Reuben, abruptly.

"What'll I take? I hadn't thought o' it. What'll ye give?"

"All I've got here."

"How much is that?"

"I haven't any money, but I've got my gun and silver shoe buckles — "

"Oh, I thought *we'd* got your gun. Beg your pardon; I might be mistaken, though."

"Yes, you have," replied Reuben, realizing his complete helplessness. "I don't know that I've got much here, Steve, but my mother would pay you well,— I know she would,— if you'd let me go."

"Can't do it," said Stephen Carle, shaking his head solemnly. "This is my *business*, same's my brother's is peddlin'. Every man has got to make an honest living, an' some does it one way, an' some does it other ways."

"You won't get anything for taking me to Brunswick."

"I won't? Well, mebbe I won't, but I think I shall. I think I shall get a *little* something out o' it. I most always have managed somehow to come out pretty well in my deals so far."

Reuben thought of the reports that were current of the rewards offered by the British for prisoners taken, and was silent.

"Besides," resumed Stephen Carle, "the business is 'most ended, anyway, an' ye won't have to stay long. I shouldn't be s'prised if 'twas all over inside o' a week or two."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, everybody knows, I reckon, unless 'tis a few obstinate rebels, that Howe is a-comin' into Jersey with a big army. He's been sendin' steady more o' the Hessians an' more o' the redcoats to Brunswick for days past. An' it won't be but a few days before he'll have the whole thing in his hands. Then where'll I be? My business will be gone, and I've got to look out for myself while the chance is given. Both sides is fightin' over the property, and all I've done has been to step in an' take the bones."

"I don't see why you can't let me go," pleaded Reuben.

"Can't be done," replied Stephen Carle, shaking his head decidedly as he spoke. "'Twouldn't do nohow. But as I was tellin' ye, ye won't have to stay long, 'cause the whole thing is going to be over and done with in a few days. The rebels are goin' to be caught in a trap when Howe and Cornwallis begin to move. There won't be a rebel left between here and Philadelphia. No, sir! not one!"

In his eagerness the man went on to relate to Reuben all the reports that were current of the prospective doings of the British; but though at another time Reuben would have been deeply interested in what he was hearing, just now he was so nearly overwhelmed by his misfortunes that he gave but slight heed to what his loquacious companion was saying. As to a release for himself, the prospect was dim

indeed. He ventured to renew his promise that if he was permitted to go free, his mother would give Stephen Carle a reward double that which the British paid.

But his captor steadily refused to listen, though he did offer the slight comfort that when Reuben should have been turned over to the authorities at Brunswick, the officers might not hold him, as he was not enrolled among the American militia. But the very fact that he had been taken while he was conducting a Hessian soldier as a prisoner to Bound Brook would militate against him.

Stephen Carle soon relapsed into silence when he perceived that his words were not heeded, and Reuben was left to his own gloomy thoughts, which turned frequently from the sorrow which would come to his father and mother, to General Washington and his troubles, if what had just been told him should prove to be correct.

The slow hours passed, and weary from the exertions of the preceding night, hungry, thirsty, and forlorn, at last Reuben fell asleep. Several hours had elapsed when he awoke, and when his eyes first opened he hardly recognized his surroundings.

The light of the afternoon sun crept in through the cracks and knot holes of the bridge and cast long streaks of light across the floor. Stephen Carle was lying upon the floor and peering intently down at some-

thing in the old bridge, but as Reuben stirred, he motioned savagely for him to be silent, and the lad did not move from his position.

A moment later Stephen Carle, possessed with some strange feeling of excitement, hastily rose from the floor and with his pistol in his hand stood crouching near the trap-door, which slowly rose from its place, and in a moment Reuben recognized the face of Abraham Patten before him.

CHAPTER XIX

TO BRUNSWICK

FOR an instant Abraham Patten gazed at the two men as if he failed to understand what their presence meant, then unmindful of the weapon and words of Stephen Carle he quickly dropped from his position, endeavoring at the same time to pull the trap-door to after him. Reuben could hear him as he struck the planks of the bridge, but in a moment Stephen Carle had the trap-door lifted again, and leaning through it he called to Abraham Patten to give himself up.

Evidently his words were not heeded, for Reuben could plainly hear the man as he ran swiftly over the rough planking. Before he was fully aware of what was being done Stephen Carle had discharged his pistol, and then pulling the trap-door down after him, slid down the strap and was himself on the floor beneath. There were shouts and calls and the sound of running men, and the confusion for the moment seemed to be unbounded. To make matters still worse, the hoarse wild cry or groan that had so startled Reuben and Jacob and terrified Uncle Philemon on a previous occasion was now heard also, and mingling as it did

with the din, increased the confusion in the mind of the listening lad.

Hardly realizing what he was doing, he lifted the trap-door and peered down at the bridge below him. The sounds of flight and pursuit had ceased abruptly and even the deep groaning could no longer be heard. What had become of the men it was impossible to discover, for not one of them could now be seen or heard, and a silence almost as oppressive as the recent exciting disturbance had been, rested over all.

But by this time Reuben had been enabled to recover a measure of self-possession, and the sight of the rope (or rather of the long heavy leathern strap) which was dangling before him presented too strong a temptation to be ignored. Hastily seizing it, he swung himself free from the place in which he had been, and in a moment was swiftly descending. Without hesitating a moment, he turned and ran swiftly toward the entrance of the bridge ; for though the sounds he had heard had seemed to come from both ends of the structure, still no one could be seen there now, and the hope of escape was strong upon him.

Unmindful of the noise his feet made as he sped over the planks, without once turning his head to discover whether or not his flight had been perceived, he ran swiftly forward, exerting all the strength he possessed. As he approached the entrance, he endeavored to increase the speed at which he was running, but as he

stepped out into the light, the soldier who had assisted in his capture rushed forward from the timbers behind which he had been standing, and throwing his arms about the neck of the fleeing lad, fell with him heavily to the ground. Over and over they rolled down the embankment until both were brought up abruptly against the rail fence at the base. Reuben was quicker than his would-be captor, and instantly springing to his feet darted back into the bridge and ran swiftly toward the opposite entrance.

The man from whom he had for the moment escaped was now swiftly following, and shouting as he ran for his comrades to come to his aid. Before the lad had gained the open air his heart sank within him when he beheld Stephen Carle and the Hessian appear in the open space and swiftly approach. Almost in despair, Reuben turned back again, but he was caught between the men, and further resistance would be useless. Accordingly he stopped abruptly and waited for the men to approach. Instead of treating him roughly, as he had feared they would, the men without a word simply tied his hands securely behind his back and then bidding him follow them, returned to the end of the bridge where they had just appeared.

Then Reuben perceived that two other red-coated men were there also, and between them Abraham Patten was standing, his arms tightly bound to his body, his hat removed from his head, and the entire

bearing of the man giving tokens of the complete dejection which possessed him. His face was ashen pale, and his body was trembling as with an ague. Indeed, the appearance of the man so strongly appealed to Reuben that for a moment even his own misfortunes were ignored, as he gazed pityingly at the prisoner, for he was now aware of the source of Abraham Patten's fear, and well knew that it was not groundless.

There was a brief whispered conversation between Stephen Carle and one of the soldiers, and then three of the men, one marching a few yards in advance, and two taking their places one on each side of the unfortunate Abraham Patten, started across the fields. Reuben gazed after them, wondering why it was that they had abandoned the road, but Stephen Carle soon spoke to him, and then in the company of his captor and the Hessian soldier he too was bidden to start, and they began the ascent of the low hill, keeping to the road.

No one spoke, and the pace at which they were moving was so rapid that Reuben was given no opportunity to speak, even had he been so minded. For an hour the steady pace was maintained, and the sun was beginning to disappear from sight. A burning thirst by this time had seized upon the young prisoner, and turning his head toward Stephen Carle he begged for water.

Stephen Carle nodded his head, but made no response, and the steady pace was maintained until Reuben al-

most felt that he could go no farther. It seemed to him that every muscle in his body was sore and aching. His throat was parched and his arms were numb, and his strength was so nearly gone that every step required a special exertion. Footsore, his eyes burning, his breath coming in gasps, he still stumbled on, doing his utmost to maintain the pace at which they were moving.

"In here!" said Stephen Carle at last, leading the way as he turned into a narrow path that led directly into the forest as far as Reuben was enabled to see.

In single file the men followed the pathway, one preceding and one following the lad, and in a brief time they came into a little clearing, in the centre of which stood a small log cabin. Stephen Carle whistled shrilly through his fingers as they drew near, and in response the door of the house was suddenly opened, and a man so strange in his appearance appeared, that weary as Reuben was he gazed in astonishment at him. His body was so short that it did not seem that his head could have stood more than three feet from the ground, but his head was enormous, and his arms so long that to Reuben it almost seemed that he could touch the ground with his hands without bending his body.

His features were coarse and repulsive, and the expression of his countenance so savage and forbidding, that the lad was for the moment startled almost into a forgetfulness of his own sufferings and predicament.

A huge dog, however, had rushed past his master as the door was opened, and now was approaching with so savage a growl, at the same time displaying his huge jaws and glistening teeth, that Reuben drew back. Stephen Carle, however, advanced, and seizing the ears of the brute, one in each hand, shook the huge head savagely as he said: "You rascal! What do you mean by growling and sneering at me like that? Go on with you!" and administering a kick he sent the dog slinking to the rear of the house.

Wondering at the easy mastery of the savage brute which Stephen Carle displayed, Reuben approached the house, following his companions. He could see that the owner of the dog was angry at the treatment his pet had received, and was fiercely gazing at Stephen Carle, who, however, was apparently in no wise disturbed by the fact.

"You horse thief!" muttered the strange being. "Why did you kick my dog? Come here, poor fellow," he added, whistling to his dog, which was to be seen peering around the corner of the building. The animal came slinking to its master with every evidence of affection, and leaping up, placed his fore paws on the shoulders of the little man and licked his face. The man bore the affectionate greeting without stirring, until the dog, crouching at his feet, gazed again at the strangers, growling to himself and displaying his willingness to dispose of them all if his master should only give him the word.

"What was it you called me?" said Stephen Carle, with a laugh.

"A horse thief!" retorted the man, angrily.

"Ah, yes. If I am a stealer of horses, what do you call yourself?" Stephen Carle's voice was loud, and could have been heard far away. Whether it was the noise that Stephen Carle made or the fear which his words inspired, Reuben could not determine, but the man's manner abruptly changed as glaring at Stephen he muttered savagely, though he did not glance at him as he spoke, "Roaring bull of Bashan! Roaring bull of Bashan!"

"Judas Iscariot! Judas Iscariot! Judas Iscariot!" retorted Stephen Carle, not once looking at the strange creature before him, and roaring out the words as if he was minded to show that the epithet bestowed upon him was not in vain.

For a moment neither spoke, and then Stephen Carle said quietly: "We've had enough of calling of names, Ephraim. We want something to eat and we want it mighty bad and mighty quick, too. Get it for us. And lots of it while you're at it."

"I'll see what I've got," replied the man, quietly, and he turned at once into the house.

Reuben then turned with Stephen Carle and the Hessian to the well that was in the clearing, and while the Hessian freed his hands at the bidding of his companion, Stephen Carle himself manipulated the long

sweep, and in a brief time had lifted a bucket filled with water from the depths below. Then balancing the bucket on the edge of the curb he drank of the contents until Reuben began to wonder if he ever would cease. At last with a grunt of satisfaction he bade the Hessian follow his example, and then Reuben had his turn.

Never had the lad tasted anything so refreshing as was that long, deep draught of cold water, and when he turned back to the house with the men, a part of his feeling of exhaustion was gone. The three now entered, Reuben's hands still being left free, and seating themselves at the low table, were soon served by the master of the house, who evidently was cook as well as proprietor. All his fierceness of manner now seemed to be gone, and though he seldom spoke, his evident willingness to minister to the necessities of his guests was apparent in his every movement. And the food itself was of no mean quality, though doubtless the nearly famished condition of the men about the board made them in no wise critical of the provision their strange little host had made for them.

At last their hunger was satisfied, and leaving Reuben with the Hessian, though the lad's hands were once more secured behind his back, Stephen Carle withdrew to the yard and had a long conversation with his host. What was said Reuben had no means of knowing, but when Stephen Carle reentered the house his eagerness to depart was at once apparent.

At his word the march was resumed, and in the light of the moon, which was shining in full splendor in the evening sky, the three men proceeded swiftly on their way. Reuben was familiar with this part of their journey and was aware that only a few rods away was the Raritan. Indeed, for much of the way the river itself could be plainly seen, its waters sparkling in the moonlight and its wooded shores clearly defined. Brunswick was not far away now, and in an hour or less the party came to the "fort," as the rude earthworks on the outskirts of the town were commonly called.

There were three of these so-called forts on the borders of the quaint old Dutch town, for the skirmishes between the foraging parties of the redcoats and the zealous Whig farmers of the region had become increasingly common of late, and to guard against any possible attack by these men, the rude earthworks had been thrown up and guards had been stationed at each.

There was a brief delay as Stephen Carle halted and held a brief conversation with the men on guard, but apparently satisfied by what he had heard, he soon gave the word, and the party proceeded toward the town. As they went on, Reuben perceived that Stephen Carle had indeed spoken truly when he had declared that the numbers of the British soldiers had recently been greatly increased. As they passed along King George street, it seemed to the troubled lad that the old town was filled

with redcoats and Hessians. He could hear the words of their songs and their shouts and laughter, for it was evident that they were given large liberty, though this might be only for the night.

Reuben had begged of Stephen Carle that he might be taken at once to the quarters of those who should determine whether or not he was to be held as a prisoner, but had received no satisfactory reply to his request. Indeed, the entire bearing of Stephen Carle had changed since they had entered the town, and if Reuben had not been so downcast and intent upon his own personal problems, he might have seen that his captor apparently was by no means certain of his own safety even though he was in the presence of King George's army.

They had departed from the main street and were making their way through the more unfrequented parts of the town, but Reuben was familiar with all the streets and passages and was well aware of the place Stephen Carle evidently was seeking. Nor had he long to wait before his fears and suspicions were fulfilled, for soon the buildings of the old court-house and jail loomed up before him. Several times he had repeated his request for Stephen Carle to take him to the proper authorities, but no response had been made, and Reuben soon abandoned the effort, and when they halted before the guard-house he had given up all hope of help, at least for the night.

Stephen Carle held a brief conversation with the guard, and then returning to the place where Reuben and the Hessian had been left to wait for him, bade them follow him. Obediently Reuben did as he was told, and in a brief time the heavy lock had been turned, the doors were opened, and then closed behind him, as he found himself in the old guard-house in Brunswick town.

CHAPTER XX

WITH THE PRISONERS

NO blanket or covering of any kind was given Reuben, but the night was warm, and he was so nearly worn out by his recent exertions, that he soon stretched himself upon the floor and was soundly sleeping in the midst of the prisoners. He had not recognized any of his fellow-sufferers, and though he knew that his own brother Philip was doubtless somewhere in the company, it was useless even to attempt to make any investigations or inquiries as to his whereabouts at such a time; and so he endeavored to wait for the morning to come with such patience as his soul then possessed.

Early on the following morning the prisoners were astir, and Reuben Denton joined the line of men that sought the well in the yard. Here the morning ablutions were attended to, and the indifference as to their condition or surroundings which most of the men manifested, impressed the lad as being sadly out of keeping. For himself his fears of the preceding day had returned with redoubled force, and he was thoroughly miserable as he awaited his turn at the trough into which water from the one well had been poured.

The day was bright and warm, but the sunlight seemed like a mockery to Reuben. Even his hopes of being able to explain his condition to the proper authorities had become dim, and he was able to find slight comfort in the apparent indifference of his companions in misery. He had discovered a few familiar faces in the assembly, but in his present state of mind he did not care to enter into conversation with any one. One or two of the men spoke pleasantly to him, but his own evident desire to be left to himself was so apparent that even that slight courtesy was not renewed.

The coming of new men into their midst was so common that the arrival of Reuben aroused but little interest, and the men soon separated into the groups or messes that had been arranged for the meals; but Reuben had no feeling of hunger, and even the preparations for breakfast created no real interest on his part. He watched the men idly as if he had no part or lot in the common life of the prisoners, and after a few minutes turned away and started toward a secluded corner of the enclosed yard. He had taken but a few steps, however, when he felt the touch of a hand laid upon his shoulder. Turning sharply about, he recognized his own brother Phil, and at another time would have laughed heartily at the expression of blank amazement that swept over his face. The tears came into the lad's eyes and for a moment he could not trust himself to speak. Even Phil Denton, despite his added years (he

was three years older than Reuben), was also strangely moved, and for a brief moment the brothers gazed into each other's face, while neither broke the awkward silence.

Phil was the first to speak, and in a low voice he said : "I couldn't really believe it was you, Reuben, when I first saw you. How is it? How does it happen that you are here?"

"I was brought here last night by Steve Carle and two others."

"Steve Carle? Why, he was almost hanged over at Bound Brook! He would have been, too, if it hadn't been for that attack they made on us there. He was in irons, and the very next day he would have had his neck stretched."

"That may all be so, but he was the one that brought me here, all the same."

"Tell me about it, Reuben."

Reuben then related to his brother all that had occurred within the past few days, his brother listening attentively and making no comments until the story had all been told.

Then he said quietly : "Do they know anything about this at home, Reuben? Has mother heard of it?"

"No. How could she hear? That's the hardest part of it all."

"We'll have to get word to her, then. I think I can do it; that is, if we're not sent to New York this morning."

"To New York? Will they send us there?" inquired Reuben, eagerly.

"I don't know. That's the report, and I know that a good many have been sent away since I came here. Probably they're sent over to the sugar-houses. There was a story floating around yesterday that another batch was to be sent over to-day, and we may be the ones that will have to go."

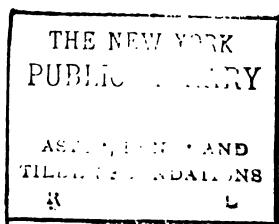
"Do you really think they'll hold me?" said Reuben, with a fear he could not disguise. "I don't believe they'll keep me. They have no right! I'm not a soldier. I wasn't in the army. They have no right to shut me up here! I'm going to see — see — somebody," he added, not knowing just what it was that he was to see. "They'll let me go when they know how it is. They will! They must!"

Philip Denton smiled slightly as he shook his head and said: "I'm afraid not, Reuben. Right or not, they won't be willing to let you go, I'm sure. Besides, according to your own story, you were taking a Hessian prisoner to Bound Brook, and Stephen Carle's story will be taken ahead of yours."

Philip Denton, though he was three years older than his brother, was not so tall as he by several inches. His dark curly hair was in sharp contrast with the light hair of Reuben, and his thickset, sturdy frame seemed doubly strong beside the slighter figure of his younger brother. His eyes were black, and Reuben's were blue,



"THERE SHE COMES, NOW"



so that the resemblance between them was so slight that a stranger would never have thought of them as boys having the same father and mother.

But despite the differences in their personal appearance, the affection each bore the other was unusually strong, and with all of a younger brother's confidence Reuben thought there was no one in all the world quite equal to Phil Denton. Accordingly, when Phil expressed his opinion as he did, Reuben at once concluded that what he said must of necessity be correct, and at once accepted his conclusion as the truth. For a moment he was silent, and his depression was so marked that his brother was moved to assume an air of cheerfulness he was far from feeling, as he said lightly:—

"Oh, well, Reuben, it may not turn out to be so bad, after all. It's almost breakfast time now, and we'll feel better after we've had something to eat."

"Some of the men are eating already," replied Reuben, as he glanced for a moment at the prisoners assembled near a huge kettle that was in the yard.

"I don't eat there."

"Where do you eat?"

"Why, I've a good friend who helps me out. You know Mrs. Van Deursen, don't you?"

"Yes, I know her; but what of that?"

"A good deal of that. She comes to the guard-house every morning and brings me my breakfast, and

you shall share it with me now. She's usually brought more than I could dispose of myself, and I've divided it among my friends. There she comes now," he added, as the gate was opened and an elderly woman entered with a large basket on her arm.

"I didn't know the redcoats would let any one do that," said Reuben, as he followed his brother, who had turned to meet the woman.

"Oh, yes, they'll let them feed us, and are probably glad to have them do it, too. It's better for them, and I know it's a good deal better for us."

They had now approached the motherly appearing woman who, as soon as she recognized Philip Denton, placed her basket on the ground and an expression of sympathy mingled with anger, creeping over her face as she spoke, said:—

"I was late this morning, Philip. I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it."

"I'm so glad to see you," replied Philip, "that I never thought of your being late. It's good of you to come, anyway, and I'm lucky to have such a friend. I didn't notice it this morning, for you see my brother Reuben is here with me."

Mrs. Van Deursen glanced kindly at Reuben as he spoke, and then said: "What's he doing here? He isn't going to stay, is he?"

Philip nodded his head, but made no other response. "You don't mean it!" exclaimed the good woman,

her eyes snapping. "They'll be taking the infant babies from their mothers' arms next. Tell me about it!"

The story was speedily told, and the indignation of Mrs. Van Deursen waxed stronger.

"I didn't tell you why I was late this morning, did I?" she demanded sharply.

"What made you late?" said Philip, gently.

"I've got some boarders — that's why."

"Boarders?"

"Yes, boarders, loafers, good-for-nothing redcoat soldiers. They've quartered four men on me."

"Are they good to you?"

"Good? Yes, good for nothing! Why, this very morning one of them, a sergeant by the name of McNally, was going to take this breakfast I'd been cooking for you, away from me! He said the best I had belonged to them. Hoot! What I give, or rather what I used to give, the pigs before he came, is too good for such as he!"

"He didn't get the breakfast, anyway," suggested Philip.

"Get it? No, he didn't get it. But he got something else."

"What was that?"

"He got too free with his orders and talk, so before I got him a mite to eat, I put straight down to his captain's. Yes, sir, that's just what I did! And I told

him all about it, and asked him if I'd got to have some of his men to feed, why I couldn't have gentlemen anyway. I wasn't used to the McNally kind."

"What did the captain say to that?"

"He didn't say much, but he sent straight off for this McNally and told me to wait right there till he came. I waited, and I'm satisfied, perfectly satisfied now."

"Why? What did he do?"

"Do? He gave that—that Irish sergeant such a tongue lashing that I felt ashamed and sorry for the wretch. Yes, indeed, I did! And he told him that if I reported such a thing of him again, that he'd send him back to New York in irons. Yes, sir, that's just exactly what he said. I don't think I shall report him again. I don't think I'll have to, and I don't believe I should, even if he should say that he'd got to sleep on my very best live-geese feather bed. Come, boys, eat your breakfast," she added sharply. "I can't stay here all day talking to you."

The boys fell to with a will, and the round, full face of the good woman beamed with pleasure as she saw her viands rapidly disappearing. And yet despite her evident satisfaction, Philip Denton thought he could detect an expression of anxiety on her motherly countenance. What the cause of it was he had no means of knowing, and when after they had eaten what she had brought she took her basket and prepared to depart she did not

explain, Philip was not quite bold enough to inquire. Besides, he was troubled by another problem, and said to her as she was about to depart: "Mrs. Van Deursen, do you think you could somehow get word to my mother that Reuben is here? She doesn't know where he is or what has become of him and will be beside herself with worry. I don't know that you can do it — "

"I don't know that I can, either," interrupted the woman, "but there's nothing to hinder me trying if I want to, is there?"

"Thank you!" was all that the boys could say.

Mrs. Van Deursen did not linger, but retired at once, the guards permitting her to pass without a question, for orders had been received that she and certain other worthy women should be granted permission to bring their friends among the prisoners the food which they themselves prepared for them. Naturally they were not given permission to meet their friends except in the presence of the guards, but there was nothing to prevent them from doing much to add to the comfort of the men confined in the guard-house, and many were the prisoners in the Brunswick jail who had good cause to bless the true-hearted women who ministered to them in this time of need.

The feeling between the contending parties, though it was exceeding strong, had nevertheless at this time not attained to the degree of intense bitterness that marked the later years of the struggle, and the easy-going ways

of General Howe himself — ways for which he was afterwards sharply blamed by his friends — doubtless also contributed indirectly to the comfort of the men whom his own soldiers had made prisoners. That the feeling, however, was in no wise friendly, both Philip and Reuben Denton were soon to learn.

Several days elapsed, but the rumored withdrawal of some or all of the prisoners at Brunswick to the over-crowded sugar-houses in New York was not made. The rumors, however, steadily continued, but in response to the repeated questions of the boys even Mrs. Van Deursen on the occasion of her daily visits could give no definite knowledge. The fact that some had certainly been taken to New York a few weeks before this time could not be denied, and the increasing number of the men in the guard-house as well as the knowledge all now possessed of the additional forces of the British which were gathering at Brunswick, increased the fear of the prisoners, and gave color to the current reports. Mrs. Van Deursen assured the boys that she had done her utmost to send word to their mother of their whereabouts and safety, and though she had received no definite assurance that her message had been delivered, still in her motherly manner she strove to comfort the hearts of the young prisoners, giving it as her very pronounced opinion that the Denton household was now aware of the fate of its missing members.

Since his coming, Reuben had neither seen nor heard

anything concerning Abraham Patten. That he had not been confined in the common guard-house was evident, for Reuben had satisfied himself as to that. He had questioned the guards, but they professed an ignorance, which, whether real or pretended, shed no light on the problem of the man's fate. Philip was confident that he must have been sent to New York—a conclusion in which Reuben did not fully concur.

As he recalled the many strange and well-nigh unexplainable actions of the man, he was at times puzzled to decide whether the man was a friend or an enemy of the cause of the colonies.

But one morning after several days had passed, not only Reuben Denton but the entire body of prisoners in the Brunswick jail were thrown into a state of intense excitement, as the outcome of Abraham Patten's coming to the town became known to all.

CHAPTER XXI

THE FATE OF ABRAHAM PATTEN

"**W**E had a right good hanging here last night," remarked one of the guard to Philip and Reuben on the morning to which reference has been made in the preceding chapter.

The boys had just turned from the trough where their morning ablutions were performed and were waiting for the daily arrival of Mrs. Van Deursen. Not once since their coming had the good woman failed them, and her comforting words and motherly counsel had done almost as much to keep up the hearts of the young prisoners as had the food she had brought. This food they had shared with certain of their companions in misery, and on several occasions, when Mrs. Van Deursen had brought them fried chickens, Philip had insisted upon dividing the tempting viands with their guards.

Reuben had demurred at this action of his brother, but his protests had been overruled, for Philip declared they would not be the losers by their generosity, and the results had already shown that his surmises were correct. Although no marked privileges had been

granted the boys, still there was already an indication that the strictness with which some of their companions were guarded was, in certain particulars, somewhat relaxed in their own case, and they were granted the freedom of the yard adjoining the guard-house more readily than others secured it.

As the guard spoke, both boys turned sharply, and Philip said: "A hanging? Who was hanged? What was he hanged for?"

"Oh, 'twas a rebel spy. I'm not saying he didn't show considerable spunk when it came to the last pinch, but he won't bother any one any more."

"Who was it?" demanded Reuben, eagerly, his heart sinking as he felt a conviction that he already knew who the unfortunate man was.

"'Twas a man by the name of Batten or Tappen, or some such name."

"Was it Patten? Abraham Patten?" said Reuben.

"That's it! That's it! That's the very fellow!"

"Hanged? Are you sure? What was he hanged for?" said Philip.

"Of course he was hanged, for I was there myself, and lots of others saw the hanging, too. If all the rebels in Jersey could have been there, they wouldn't try any more to fight us, I'm thinking. Served him right, too," he added.

Both boys were so depressed by what they had heard that the guard passed on and left them, but in a brief

time the report had spread among the prisoners, and great was the excitement that followed. A few had been personally acquainted with the unfortunate man, and had their stories to tell of what he had done, and the part he had borne in the struggle; but to the most he was unknown, and the report of the terrible fate that had befallen him was exceedingly depressing. The uncertainty of their own situation, the rumors of what the British were planning to do with their prisoners, and the confinement itself were all hard to be borne, but the report of what had befallen Abraham Patten was worst of all.

Throughout the day the feeling of gloom, almost of despair, was manifest on every side, and whenever two or three of the prisoners met and talked in low tones together, it was not difficult for any one who observed them to understand both what the topic of their conversation was and what the feelings of the men were also.

Mrs. Van Deursen arrived at her usual time, and in response to the eager queries of the boys, acknowledged that she had heard of the execution, but knew but little of the details. Although she strove to keep up her usual flow of spirits, it was not difficult either for Philip or Reuben to perceive that she was almost as much depressed as they were themselves, and when she departed for her home, the boys were left to the general feeling of gloom that pervaded the entire body of prisoners.

Anger, fear, and hopelessness were manifest on every side, and the very uncertainty as to the outcome of their own capture increased the anxiety of the wretched men, and all the day long the excitement continued. On the following day it was modified somewhat, though still the fate of Abraham Patten was evidently uppermost in the minds of all. In response to their many questions, the only information the guards gave (perhaps it was all in their power to give), was that he had been tried, convicted, and hanged as a rebel spy.

On the third day after the event, however, the guard had handed a paper to Philip and explained that there was an account of the hanging of Abraham Patten to be found in it. Eagerly the boys withdrew to a quiet corner in the yard, and spreading the Tory sheet out before them, read the following account:—

“Abraham Patten, a spy from the rebel army, was executed at Brunswick, New Jersey, last Friday between eleven and twelve o’clock at night. He had agreed to give a grenadier fifty guineas to carry four letters to Washington and Putnam; the soldier took the cash and carried the letters to his Excellency, Lord Cornwallis, wherein was proposed to set fire to Brunswick in four places at once, blow up the magazine, and then set off a rocket as a signal for the rebels to attack the town. At the gallows he acknowledged all the charges brought against him, and said he was a principal in setting fire to New York, but would not accuse any of his accom-

plices. The said Patten formerly lived in New York, and has left a wife and four children at Baltimore in Maryland."

"I don't believe it! I don't believe a word of it!" declared Reuben when the item had been read. "He was a spy, but he was not a villain."

"I never saw him; I didn't know him at all," said Philip, thoughtfully.

"Well, I did, and though he was a queer stick in some ways, he was a good friend of Mr. Coddington, and he wouldn't have had anything to do with him, I know, if he hadn't been all right. 'Tis another of the Tory lies!"

"Perhaps so; I hope so, I am sure. You say you were in that place he had fixed up in the old covered bridge?"

"Yes. Uncle Philemon was the first to learn of it, and it scared him so that he didn't know what to do. He was sure it was something the Evil One had gotten up on purpose for him. Say, Phil, there was one thing I never could understand about it, though. What do you suppose made that awful groaning there? Why, Phil, it sounded like the dying groans of a hundred men."

"I don't know. 'Twasn't anything, though. You just thought it was so, I reckon."

"Thought it? Not much, I didn't think it! Why, Phil, I heard it at three different times when I was there. I could hear it a good deal plainer than I can hear you now."

"Tell me about the place again, Reuben."

"Why, 'twas a sort of a room he'd fixed up, you see. He'd laid some flooring across the timbers—you know a part of the bridge was fixed up in that way anyhow, and he'd made a room there. He slept there nights, too, for I saw the bed he'd rigged up. Then there was the long strap up which he'd go just as lively as a gray squirrel climbs a tree, and when he'd got up he'd pull the strap up after him, and there would be nothing to show. Uncle Philemon was terribly scared when he saw him go up that strap, and he thought Abraham Patten was a ghost and that he went straight up through the roof. You see 'twas in the nighttime when he happened to see it."

Reuben did not feel called upon to refer to the feelings which had seized upon him and Jacob when they, too, in the dim light had seen the body of a man swinging to and fro in mid air and at last to all appearances disappearing abruptly through the roof of the old bridge. However, as Philip was ignorant of the experiences of the boys, he was not troubled by Reuben's sin of omission, if sin it might be termed.

"'Twas a good place," remarked Philip, thoughtfully, "right between Brunswick and Bound Brook. He could get there in a hurry from either side."

"Yes, and he used to meet people there, too. Mr. Coddington used to see him there, I know, and probably there were some that came from Brunswick, too. Stephen

Carle must have learned of the place somehow, and fixed a trap for him. What do you suppose has become of Steve Carle? We haven't seen or heard of him, since I came."

"Oh, I've no doubt that Steve has joined the redcoats or at least has gone to work for them."

"He says he works for nobody but himself."

"That may all be true, but it wouldn't hinder him from going there now. You said he was sure the end had almost come."

"That's the way he talked, Philip; you don't really suppose there's any — any — danger that they'll serve us the way they did Abraham Patten, do you?" Reuben spoke anxiously, and his fears were not without effect upon his brother.

"No. I'm not afraid of that. They can't do it. We're but prisoners, though that's bad enough."

"You are, but I'm not sure about myself. I think it's strange I can't get any word from anybody. I don't understand it."

"You're only a boy, Reuben," said Philip. "They won't harm you."

"I know. If I was as old as you, I might be afraid they'd hang me." Reuben spoke for the moment almost lightly; for the words had carried his thoughts back to the perpetual difference of opinion which had existed between him and his brother concerning this very matter. But in a brief time his anxiety returned, and the uncer-

tainty of his position, increased now by the report he had just read of the fate of Abraham Patten, weighed heavily upon him. The newspaper the guard had given them had now been passed on to their comrades, and the intense interest of all the prisoners speedily became manifest. When the sun disappeared that day, sinking behind a heavy bank of clouds in the western sky, it left behind it a darkness that was almost typical of the state of mind among the men in the Brunswick jail.

Nor had the feeling departed when morning came. Though Philip Denton had no fear that either he or his brother would be served as Abraham Patten had been, there still remained the prospect, by no means dim or unreal, that they might be transferred to the prisons of New York, and the terrible tales that were commonly told of the sufferings and privations of the men there under the treatment of the brutal Cunningham had made him fearful of the fate that might befall him and Reuben.

Mrs. Van Deursen soon came, but this morning she lingered longer than she was wont to do, and Philip began to suspect that she had something to communicate to them. Her manner strengthened his suspicions, for the worthy woman several times appeared to be about to speak, but the approach of the guard or a prisoner caused her to break off abruptly, all of which certainly was not her usual manner.

"Have you had any word from my mother?" Reuben inquired at last.

"Not a word, not a word."

"It's strange. I can't understand it," said Philip.

"Nor I," responded Mrs. Van Deursen. "I'm sure they must have got it."

All three became silent for a time, and then the woman spoke again. "It's a shame that you two boys should be kept here! It's a burning shame, that's what it is."

"The redcoats don't seem to see it in that light," said Philip, quietly.

"How many guards are on at night?" inquired Mrs. Van Deursen, in a low voice, abruptly, and looking quickly about her as she spoke.

"Eight. Two on each side," said Philip, looking into her eyes; Reuben, too, was alert now, and had looked up from the food before him.

"Hush! Don't talk so loud! Don't mention it! I didn't mean anything," said Mrs. Van Deursen, hastily. She was agitated strongly, however, and her very effort to conceal her fears increased the interest of the boys. Both, however, were wise enough to look down and apparently to give all their attention to the food the woman had brought.

"No," began Mrs. Van Deursen again, speaking not much above a whisper, "I can't help you or any one else. I've given my word, and even if I should try to

get you out of here, it would only mean that I'd never be allowed to come in again, and if this dreadful war keeps on, there's no knowing how many poor fellows I shall have to feed. No, I couldn't think of it! Indeed, I couldn't."

"No, of course not," replied Philip, in a low voice, though he could not entirely conceal his eagerness. There was more in what Mrs. Van Deursen was saying, he was positive, than appeared upon the surface, but he resolved to be cautious. "No, you can't be expected to do anything to help us. I don't know that any one can do anything. And yet it's hard that we shall have to be shut up in the sugar-house in New York. I think I could stand it all right for myself, but it's hard for my mother, though she may never hear what has become of us."

"She'll hear. I'll take good care that she hears." Mrs. Van Deursen's eyes were brimming with tears, but her voice was firm and strong, though she still spoke in a low tone. "It's a shame! It's a burning disgrace to keep such boys!"

Neither of the boys made any reply.

After another brief period of silence Mrs. Van Deursen said again, "How many guards did you say there were in the nighttime?"

"Eight. Two on each side."

"Yes. Yes. Do you know any of them real well? Same men always on guard?"

"No; different men. Some of them we know, and some we don't."

"I'm not going to help you or any one to get out. I can't do it. 'Twouldn't be safe. But if"—here she turned and glanced hastily about her to make sure that no one was listening—"if I was a man, which, thank goodness, I'm not—as I was saying—if—if I was a man, and if I was—"

The guard was now approaching, and Mrs. Van Deursen rose abruptly and prepared to depart. As she leaned low to pick up her basket, Philip hastily moved to assist her, and for a moment their heads were near together.

"Applejack and laudanum. Applejack and laudanum," whispered Mrs. Van Deursen, as if she was muttering something to herself.

In a moment she had taken her basket and was gone, and Philip Denton, unable to understand what she had meant by the strange words she had whispered, stood watching her until the gate had been opened and she had passed beyond his sight.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BRUNSWICK JAIL

DURING these days which Philip Denton and his brother Reuben had passed in the guard-house at Brunswick, many stirring events had occurred of which the young prisoners were in complete ignorance. An army led by John Burgoyne was already on its way from Montreal, and the great force consisting of regulars, militia, Hessians, and Indians was preparing to move from Montreal up the St. Lawrence River and then striking swiftly to the southward, was to move over beautiful Lake Champlain and Lake George, seize the old fort at Ticonderoga, and then proceed to Albany.

At Albany it was confidently expected that another division, under the command of Colonel Barry St. Leger, which also was composed of regulars, Tory militia, and their savage Indian allies, starting from Montreal and passing up the beautiful St. Lawrence and going on to the post, or fort, at Oswego, would sweep down through the Mohawk Valley, capture old Fort Stanwix, or "Fort Schuyler," as the name soon became, and join the victorious forces of John Burgoyne.

At the same time it was confidently expected by the

invaders that a large body of troops under General Howe or Sir Henry Clinton would proceed from New York up the Hudson, capture all the forts and disperse all the bands of rebels that might be found on the way, and by joining the forces which had already (in their plans at least) pushed their victorious way to Albany and there uniting, make up a great army.

In this manner it was expected that the fighting colonies would be effectually split asunder; and the division once made, the war, if war should still be persisted in,—which was by no means likely in the thoughts of the British leaders,—could be brought to a speedy termination, as the soldiers of King George would then have to conquer only the separated and weakened parts that would be left.

General Washington was not ignorant of the designs of his enemies, and with his little force of eight thousand men kept his place at Morristown, waiting to learn what Howe and Clinton would do. Naturally he thought the British leaders would do all in their power to carry out the plan already suggested, but for some strange reason Lord Howe did not leave New York and plainly showed no disposition to go to the aid of John Burgoyne. We now understand that Howe's real project was to cross New Jersey by a rapid march, fall upon the little capital (Philadelphia) of the rebels, and then by an equally swift return to New York be prepared to advance and join Burgoyne in case his aid or presence

was required by his comrade in arms, which seemed in no wise probable.

John Burgoyne was abundantly able to take care of himself and dispose of the humble forces that might attempt to make any resistance to his invasion. That such a thought as that Burgoyne should not be able to carry out his plans apparently did not occur to the minds of Howe or Clinton, and there was good reason for their belief.

In Burgoyne's army were some of the best drilled soldiers and able and successful leaders the world then knew. The Continental forces were poorly equipped, inexperienced, and not by any means united. Quarrels and jealousies were known to be common among the leaders, and to Lord Howe's mind there could be only one result of the invasion by General Burgoyne. How completely he was mistaken in his estimate, history has already taught us.

Besides all this, Howe was really very desirous of seizing Philadelphia. Just what he expected to gain by the seizure of the town it is difficult for us to-day to understand. Washington, too, was puzzled to know what Howe was really planning to do, and in his uncertainty simply waited at Morristown for his enemy to reveal his intentions. Perhaps he thought if Howe and Clinton should depart from New York and go up the Hudson to the aid of Burgoyne, that the city would be left in such an unprotected state that by swift and hard work on his own part he might be able to take it.

It may be that Howe also had this same thought in his mind, but at all events he showed no inclination to start for Albany, while he did display very decided intentions to move across New Jersey toward Philadelphia.

The uncertainty which prevailed was shared by the people and army alike. No one seemed to know just what to expect next, though as the summer days drew on, the anxiety and fear steadily increased. Many of the wavering Jerseymen had given heed to the proclamations offering pardon to the rebels which Howe had taken pains to see were distributed throughout the state. Others had become stronger in their feeling of allegiance to the cause of the colonies by the very bitterness displayed in the proclamations of the British, and as a natural consequence the feeling was running high.

The few newspapers then issued took up the matter, and blasts and counter-blasts were common. In one of the Whig papers the following notice was printed, and it may be taken as a sample of what was commonly read : —

“ TO THE TORIES:—Wanted for his Majesty’s service, as an assistant to his Excellency, General Howe and Hugh Gaines, printers and publishers of the *New York Gazette*, a gentleman who can lie with ingenuity.

“ Enquire of Peter Numbskull, collector and composer of lies for their Excellencies in New York. N.B. A good hand will receive the honor of knighthood.”

Another newspaper contained the following "Query and Remarks to General Howe": "If with thirty thousand men you conquered two towns and one village in *one* year, how many years will it be before you will be able to conquer and occupy all the towns and villages of America?" The editor commenting upon the "query," adds: "It is incumbent upon your Excellency to answer this question immediately, in order that the few recruits whom you have enlisted by your late proclamation, in which you have offered them the forfeited property of the Whigs, may know *exactly* how many *hundred years* they must wait before you eject the Whigs and give them the peaceable possession of their estates.

"Oh, fie, Sir William; fie, for shame! Such proclamations become a general at the head of a powerful and victorious army and a whole country *almost* prostrate at his feet, and not the poor contemptible chief of a vanquished, blockaded, half-starved, half-naked, half-rotten, half-paid, mongrel banditti, composed of the sweepings of the jails of Britain, Ireland, Germany, and America. Oh, fie, Sir William. Blush, blush for your proclamation!

"Carleton, Burgoyne, Howe —
Bow — wow — wow!"

The ardent Tory papers replied in a similar vein, but calling names and heaping abuse upon the heads of adversaries have never yet made an unjust cause into a righteous one or changed in any particular the determi-

nation of angry people. But doubtless those who read the issues of these papers were confirmed in their feeling for or against the colonies ; and as the plans and campaigns of the summer began to be apparent, the anger and determination of all who were engaged in the struggle became stronger.

Though Philip and Reuben Denton had no means of knowing what was occurring in the armies, they nevertheless were aware that the forces of the British at Brunswick were increasing. This was apparent from the noise in the narrow streets of the old Dutch town, from the sounds of the fifes and drums that were heard more frequently, and from the reports that somehow became current among the prisoners themselves. All this had tended to increase the fear of the two brothers, and as the days had passed they had expected almost every morning that they, with others, would be sent to New York. The army would not be willing to be bothered by prisoners when it was such a simple matter to dispose of them all by shipping them to the city. Indeed, even after the arrival of Reuben there had been repeated drafts made upon the men, and several bodies had already been sent to the sugar-houses. Just why it was that they had been overlooked, neither Philip nor Reuben could understand.

Repeatedly Reuben had endeavored to obtain permission to strive and obtain his release, but every request had been ignored ; and now, when so many days had

elapsed and still no prospect of his request being granted was to be found, he had gradually abandoned hope of aid from that source, and was striving to adjust himself to the conditions from which, apparently, there was to be no escape.

In many ways the condition of the boys was not hard. The authorities had been willing for friends of the prisoners to minister to their wants, and, as we know, Mrs. Van Deursen had made at least one visit every day since the boys had been placed in the jail.

There were other prisoners, too, who fared well at the hands of their friends, and altogether the lot of the men in Brunswick was far better than that of the men confined in the jails and improvised prisons of New York, if one-half the stories told of the conditions there were to be believed. The prisoners in Brunswick, too, were allowed to receive gifts of money if any had an opportunity to do so; and this money, intrusted to the guards, was spent in obtaining many comforts that served to lighten the burden of the confinement.

But the fear of being sent to New York, and the uncertainty that was daily increasing as to what the British were planning to do with the troops that were assembling in the town, were very depressing, and Philip and Reuben had, almost unconsciously to themselves, been yielding to the general feeling of despair that had come to possess all the prisoners confined in the place.

After Mrs. Van Deursen had departed on the morn-

ing referred to in the preceding chapter, the boys had remained in the place where she had left them, and for a time both were silent, though it was evident that each was thinking of their recent interviews with the worthy woman. Just what she had meant, and if she had really meant anything at all by her disjointed words, was not apparent, and yet both boys were thinking of what she had said.

Reuben was the first to speak, and looking eagerly at his brother, said :—

“ Phil, what do you suppose that woman is up to ? ”

“ I’ve been thinking of it, Reuben, but I can’t just make up my mind.”

“ Well, I think she’s got some scheme or other. But I don’t see what she can do.”

“ She can’t do anything herself. She’s promised not to ; and if she should make them suspicious, she’d never feed anybody here any more.”

“ But she’s got something in her mind. I know she has.” Reuben spoke very positively and with all the eagerness of his nature ; for like many another, the very positiveness with which he spoke somehow strengthened his own conviction.

“ Maybe she has,” replied Philip, thoughtfully. “ I am sure I hope she has, for I don’t want to stay here if there is any chance of getting out.”

“ I haven’t heard of any one getting away, have you ? ”

"No. That's a part of the plan, I think. They don't leave our men here long enough to try to break away. They ship them off to New York before they can even think of anything else."

"They haven't shipped us."

"No, they haven't; but that doesn't mean that they won't. I wish there was something we could do. I'd try almost anything before I'd be carried over there to those sugar-houses. Why, they tell me the men just starve there. Die off like sheep."

"Can't we do something?" said Reuben, eagerly. "I'm willing to try almost anything."

"I don't know. I'll have to think about it," replied Philip, glancing nervously about him as he spoke, to make sure that their words had not been overheard.

"Perhaps Mrs. Van Deursen will have something more to say to-morrow," suggested Reuben. "We can wait till we see her again before we decide."

Philip Denton smiled, but made no reply. Something more than merely waiting for the coming of their friend would be required before they even could make their way out of Brunswick, he well knew. And now that the place was filling up with the soldiers of King George, this matter of a possible escape was made still more difficult. And yet while he was thinking he walked about the yard glancing furtively at the fence or wall that bounded the enclosure. The wall was high, but not so high that one could not scale it if the oppor-

tunity were only given him. But the place was guarded carefully, and night and day armed men marched back and forth on every side.

No, he decided there was no possibility of escaping that way. Nor did any other scheme present itself to his troubled mind. The prisoners were securely held, and the prospect of release was very dark indeed.

Still, Philip Denton could not shake off the impression which Mrs. Van Deursen's words, and much more her manner, had produced. He recalled the evident excitement under which she was laboring and her desire to say something which she had nevertheless left unsaid. Perhaps she might have more to say on the following morning, and so, striving to banish the thought of what had been said, he resolved to wait with such patience as he could command for the coming visit of the good woman.

For some strange reason Mrs. Van Deursen failed to come when the morning appeared, and Philip and Reuben were compelled to seek with their fellow-prisoners the breakfast provided by the prison authorities. This of itself was by no means a pleasure, but the thought of the scanty fare was almost forgotten in the disappointment both boys felt over the non-appearance of their friend. Somehow she had been a connecting link with the world outside, and her cheery ways and abounding health had had a strong influence upon the two young prisoners. Now that for one morning she

had failed to come, her very failure had served to increase the appreciation of her former visits and care for them.

On the morning following she appeared, but she was plainly nervous and distraught. She seldom spoke, though she briefly explained that she had been unable to come the preceding day, and also stated that she might be obliged to send rather than bring the food she might prepare for them.

Both boys were evidently disappointed, for in spite of his words each had been hoping for more than he dared express. But Mrs. Van Deursen soon took her basket, and as she turned to go, again in a low whisper referred to "applejack and laudanum"; but neither of the boys displayed any comprehension of what in her mind lay behind the strange words.

CHAPTER XXIII

A VISITOR

THROUGHOUT the day, though outwardly it passed in the same apparent monotony that had marked all its forerunners, Philip and Reuben Denton could not shake off the impression that their friend Mrs. Van Deursen was either planning something in their behalf or was aware of something, they knew not what, that was likely to turn to their advantage. Her very manner had betrayed her anxiety, but save for those mysterious words, "applejack and laudanum," nothing that she had spoken had borne directly upon the perplexing problem of the young prisoners. But, though they had many a conversation during the day, when they had withdrawn to the shelter of the wall and sat in the shade with their backs leaning against the barrier, the words continued to be meaningless to them, and at last they concluded that they must have had no meaning also in the mind of their matronly friend.

Still the decision brought little comfort; and despite the positive manner in which each boy expressed his opinion that Mrs. Van Deursen had not intended to convey any hidden meaning in her reference to the well-

known drink of the old-time Jersey farmers, both were waiting with poorly concealed impatience for the morrow, for the return of the woman with her basket which had added so much to the comfort of their imprisonment.

It was early in the following morning when Philip and Reuben, after their turns at the trough, turned to watch the gate at which Mrs. Van Deursen usually appeared.

But this time she failed to come. The time passed on, and at last satisfied that the daily visit was not to be made, the boys hurriedly sought the place where the food was distributed to the prisoners and considered themselves as fortunate in being able to secure a small portion of what remained. Each strove to conceal his disappointment from the other, but with poor success, and throughout the day a feeling of intense depression possessed them both. The dreary prospect before them had not a break, and all that they could see was a possible change from the comparative comfort of the prison-house at Brunswick to the sufferings of a confinement in some one of the improvised prisons in the city of New York; and if reports were in the least worthy of credence, the present conditions were infinitely to be preferred to the ills which would befall them in the sugar-houses or churches of the city.

As the shadows of evening fell upon the dreary place, the condition of the boys seemed to them to be far more

hopeless than ever it had been. Not only had they been deceived in their surmise as to any knowledge or plan Mrs. Van Deursen had had, but they had also been deprived of her daily visit and her cheery presence, which they had become accustomed to look forward to with greater pleasure than to sharing in the good things which her well-filled basket never failed to produce. The clouds were hanging low in the sky, and an air of gloom rested over all. The shrill notes of the robins in the trees outside the walls were clear and strong, and more than one of the prisoners, as he listened, prophesied of the rain that would soon be falling. Both boys were in a mood to share in the prevailing gloom, for to them the light of hope had also been clouded over, if it had not even disappeared entirely.

"There's a man at the gate to see you," said one of the guards, at the time off duty, as he touched Reuben on the back.

"See me? Who is it?" exclaimed Reuben, quickly.

"You can tell better than I after you've seen him."

"Does he want to see me, too?" inquired Philip.

"Yes. He wants to see you both."

Eagerly the boys hastened to the gate the guard had told them of, and there they beheld a man standing inside the wall with a basket in his hands, evidently waiting for some one. Reuben peered keenly at him as he drew near, and as he perceived that it was a Mr.

Stone whom he had known before the war broke out, his heart sank, and he quickly concluded that it could not be that this was the man waiting to see them, for he was a Tory, strong and pronounced in his allegiance to the cause of King George.

And yet the man was large-hearted and genial in his manner, and several times Reuben, on the occasions when he had stopped at his house when he had come to Brunswick,—for his family had been friendly with the Dentons even before the latter had removed to New Jersey,—had good occasion to remember his kindness to him. A dog of a rare breed had been one of the presents he had received; and again and again Mr. Stone had suggested that Reuben should be permitted to leave his father's house and make his abode with him, for the man was childless and had no one to whom he could leave the mill which he owned and worked at a good profit to himself, he was wont to declare. The offer naturally had been refused, and since the coming of the war and the markedly different sentiments that controlled the two families had broken off the friendly intercourse of the previous years, Reuben had not seen the man.

"Ah, Reuben," remarked the man as the boys drew near, "I should hardly have known you, for what with the dull light and the changes in you since I last saw you I should have passed you by, I fear, if I had not been on the lookout for you."

"Then you were the man who wanted to see us?" inquired Reuben.

"Yes, and this I suppose is your brother Philip?" added Mr. Stone, as he turned for a moment and glanced at the other young prisoner. "I heard you were in the rebel army."

Mr. Stone's voice was deep and not unkindly, but he spoke in a loud tone, and it seemed for the moment to Reuben as if the man desired the near-by guard to hear what he was saying. At all events the soldier was evidently listening, and apparently was much interested in the interview.

"Yes, sir, I am Philip Denton."

"Ah, I suspected as much. You favor your mother, and so does your brother here. You should feel complimented, young gentlemen. I could say no more in your praise."

"My mother is a good woman," said Reuben, impulsively. "I wish we knew whether or not she knew we were here and were all right. We haven't had a word from her."

Mr. Stone stared at the boys for a moment and said: "Then you have not heard? That is—I mean—pardon me—you—she—have had no messages?"

"Not a word," replied Reuben, somewhat puzzled by the apparent confusion of their visitor. "That's the hardest of all. If we only knew that she knew we were all right, we'd feel better."

"Could you get them no word?"

"Mrs. Van Deursen sent word, or tried to; but not even she knows whether she succeeded or not. The lines are drawn tighter now since the red — the British have filled up Brunswick."

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Van Deursen has been a good friend to you. She is a most worthy woman."

"She's been good to us."

"Yes, yes, I can well believe that. She is not well. That is the reason for my coming. It is at her request that I am here." As he spoke, Mr. Stone glanced again at the near-by guard, as if he intended to make sure that his words were heard.

"I'm sorry to hear that; we missed her this morning."

"I do not think it is anything serious. In such trying times it is but natural that the tender-hearted or more delicate ones should suffer deeply."

Reuben was tempted to smile as he recalled the rounded matronly face and figure of Mrs. Van Deursen, who must have weighed at least two hundred pounds, but he checked the impulse and was silent, wondering why it was that the man did not leave his basket and depart.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Stone, "the king's soldiers are increasing rapidly in number here in Brunswick. I know not how many there are to be when all are assembled, but already it seems to me, who am but a man of peace, that there are more than sufficient to conquer the rebels.

The end must soon come now, and then we shall be at peace once more."

"That remains to be seen," interrupted Philip, sharply.

"I doubt not you think so. That is the impulsiveness of youth. By the way, lest I forget it, let me suggest that there are many wood-choppers in the city. I do not just understand why I should refer to this, but Mistress Van Deursen bade me tell you that such was the fact. I know it to be true, for I myself have frequently seen them."

"Wood-choppers? Wood-choppers? I don't understand," said Philip.

"Neither do I, my son, neither do I," replied Mr. Stone. "I don't just see what bearing wood-choppers can have on two young rebels held here as prisoners. At first I feared that there was some concealed meaning in the words, but now I am certain there was not, for I see clearly you are as puzzled as I."

Philip was thinking hard, but made no reply, and Reuben also was silent.

"For the sake of old friends and old times I want to leave a few coins with you," suggested Mr. Stone, blandly. "My store is somewhat scanty, owing to the privations which this wicked war enforces upon us all. Not once has the wheel in my mill been turned this year. But I live in hopes. I live in hopes. The war will soon be ended now, and once more peace and pros-

perity shall dwell together within our borders." Mr. Stone's voice became louder, and his chest swelled out with the pride of a man in his pompous words.

"We don't want your—we don't want any money," said Reuben, shortly.

"Again the pride of youth. It is as much at the suggestion of Mistress Van Deursen as at my own that I urge you to take these few coins. They will enable you to obtain some comforts outside these walls. 'Necessities' I think was the word our mutual friend used, but in that I cannot agree with her. Lord Howe and Lord Cornwallis [“Lord” was a word that evidently delighted Mr. Stone, and he rolled and prolonged the “r’s” as he repeated the word] have been exceedingly kind to men who have rebelled against their lawful sovereign. Pardon me, I mean no offence. But the truth is true, and I care not who hears it." Again he glanced at the guard, who apparently had grown weary of the prolonged conversation and was no longer listening.

Suddenly Philip decided to take the proffered money, for the reference to Mrs. Van Deursen's suggestion had caused him to feel instinctively that there might be more in the offer than appeared upon the surface. Accordingly he said: "It's kind of you, Mr. Stone, to do this. We shall take it. It's a loan, you understand, which shall be repaid just as soon as—as—we are able to do it," he added.

"Precisely," responded Mr. Stone, graciously, as he

held forth a few coins which Philip took; and though he was not able to see clearly what they were, he nevertheless was convinced that the debt would not be burdensome in its amount. Still, money was a good thing to have and might be of great service, and he was glad to receive even the small amount which had just been given him.

"Phil — Phil," began Reuben, earnestly.

"It's all right. Keep still, Reuben," said Philip, in a low voice, and his brother ceased protesting, though he still felt indignant that Philip should accept the gift.

"I doubt not you are hungry, and I am causing you to delay your evening repast," said Mr. Stone, graciously. "I think it high time for me to betake myself hence and go my way. If Mistress Van Deursen continues to be ill, as she herself declares she will be for some days to come, and I am not able to come in her place, I'll send my black boy with your food. 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him.' That was said years ago, as doubtless both you young gentlemen are aware, but the application is good now."

"You're very kind to us," said Reuben, eager for the man to be gone.

"I bid you good evening, young gentlemen," said Mr. Stone, preparing to depart. "Ah," he added, "there is one thing I came near to forgetting. In the bottom of the basket — and at Mistress Van Deursen's suggestion I will leave the basket here, and my black boy will take it on the morrow — in the bottom of the

basket you will find some applejack. 'Tis some of my good wife's own brew, and though I cannot say that I approve even of bestowing such applejack as she brews upon lads,—you will pardon me, for having known you both in the years long gone, you both seem to me to be but mere lads,—still, as I was on the point of remarking, I acted upon Mistress Van Deursen's suggestion, and caused two bottles to be placed in the bottom of the basket. She was of the opinion that it might avail you much in a time of need. 'Tis good for sickness and for —for—health, too, for the matter of that."

The reference to applejack had caused Philip to start suddenly, and he was now listening intently. Perhaps there was more than appeared in the words of the loquacious man.

"Ah, yes, I nearly forgot," began Mr. Stone again. "Mistress Van Deursen assured me that you would not be selfish in your enjoyment of the repast she provided. It is true her sympathies are with these misguided rebels in their forlorn and hopeless struggle against his Majesty's troops, but she has a good heart, notwithstanding. It was her suggestion, as I recalled, that if you should find there was more food than you yourselves cared for, that you should share it with the guards."

"We always do," said Reuben, annoyed at the suspicion.

"Yes, yes, I doubt not. I only speak because she herself referred to it."

"Was there anything else she said?" inquired Philip, eagerly.

"Why, no. And still, let me see. Yes, yes. There was something else. She did refer to certain ingredients that might be used with the applejack to advantage, but I can assure you, young gentlemen, that 'tis all right as it is. 'Twill need no toning up, for 'tis of a most excellent make, for 'twas of my own good wife's brewing. I think 'twill not be improved by adding to it. She spoke as if you already were aware of what was required in her opinion, but I doubt not she was mistaken. I bid you good evening, young gentlemen. I trust we may meet soon again, and under better and more auspicious circumstances than are the present."

This time the visitor actually departed, and as Reuben took up the basket, he muttered, "Was there ever such a wind-bag?"

"I don't know about that. I don't know whether the man was putting on or whether that was his natural way."

"His unnatural way you mean."

"Natural or unnatural, 'tis all one. He has told me some things I'm mighty glad to learn. Come over here where we'll be alone and I'll tell you all about it."

Philip was evidently strongly excited, and as Reuben followed him to a secluded corner of the prison yard, he somehow found himself sharing in his brother's feeling, although he was in ignorance as to its cause or meaning.

CHAPTER XXIV

APPLEJACK AND LAUDANUM

"**R**EUBEN," said Philip, when at last the boys were convinced that their words could not be overheard, "Mrs. Van Deursen has fixed this plan for us."

"What plan?"

"Why, she wants to help us, but she doesn't dare do it directly. Don't you see what it is? She thinks we'll see what she meant."

"I don't see. What did she mean?" inquired Reuben, thoroughly mystified.

"It's as clear as a bell. In the first place, she didn't come here yesterday or to-day, did she?"

"No. But what has that—"

"Keep still and I'll tell you. Well, she doesn't plan to come for a day or two more, and if anything happens she won't be thought of as having had anything to do with it. Now whether or not Mr. Stone knows what she is doing, I can't say. I rather think he doesn't."

"Go on, Phil."

"Well, this man leaves us some money, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"And two bottles of applejack?"

"Yes. But—"

"And didn't she herself say something about apple-jack and laudanum?"

"Yes. But we haven't any laudanum. Do you think—"

"Hush." One of the guards was approaching, and for a brief time both boys were silent, but as soon as the soldier had passed on, Philip began again. "We haven't any laudanum, but we've got the money to buy it with."

"Yes," said Reuben, slowly, beginning now to perceive what was in his brother's thoughts; "you think she means for us to put some of the laudanum in the applejack, and then give it to the—the—" Reuben paused and glanced about him as if he was fearful that the very walls had ears.

"Yes. Give it to the guards."

"And then?"

"And then we'll get over the wall somehow. I'm sure we can do it," added Philip as he glanced at the rough enclosure. "There's one thing I can't quite see, though, yet."

"What's that?"

"What he meant by speaking as he did of the wood-choppers. Don't you remember that he said there were a good many of them in Brunswick now? And he went back and spoke of it two or three times, too."

"I know. I see what he meant," said Reuben,

quickly. "If we're lucky enough to get over the wall, the way for us to do is to get past the guards by pretending that we're wood-choppers, too."

"I don't just see how we're to do that. We haven't any axes."

"But we can get some."

"How? I don't see where we can get any."

"The best plan will be for us to go to somebody that will help us. You know Mrs. Van Deursen said there were a good many of the Whigs here."

"And a good many have redcoats quartered on them, too."

"We'll have to take our chances. If we're caught we shan't be any worse off than we are now. If we can only get over the wall without being seen, we'll get a good start. But if we're seen—" Reuben stopped abruptly.

"It's worth trying," said Philip, positively. "If the laudanum works we'll be all right."

"Where can we go to get our outfit as wood-choppers?"

For several minutes the boys in low whispers talked of various people whom they knew in the town, at whose houses they would be certain to receive aid; but one after another was rejected. Some were too timid, others not sufficiently careful, and of the loyalty of still others they were in doubt. At last it was decided that they would strive to make their way to the home of Mrs. Van Dyke on Albany street, for of

her courage and discretion there could be no doubt. Her two sons had been with Philip in the militia at Bound Brook, and though the worthy woman still continued to make her home in Brunswick, her zeal was known of all men. The only question that troubled the young prisoners was whether or not she was one of those who had been compelled to provide for the keeping of certain British soldiers. But that matter must be left to fortune and was among the uncertainties of the attempt they were to make.

Another troublous matter was that of deciding whether or not some of their companions in misery should be informed of their project and permitted to join them, but after a time it was decided that they would make the attempt by themselves.

By this time their supper had been eaten, and both boys knew that they would soon be shut up in the guard-house for the night. Indeed, one of the guards was now approaching them, and as Philip perceived that he was a soldier whom they knew, he at once resolved to begin the work which they had decided should be brought to its climax on the following night if all went well.

"You are guard again to-night, Humphrey?" said Philip, as the man drew near.

"Yes," growled the soldier. "Last night till midnight, to-night, and to-morrow night. I never get a chance to go out with the others."

"That's too bad. What do you think of us? We haven't been out for weeks."

"I reckon that's so," replied the man, good-naturedly. "If what I hear is true, you won't get a chance to see the green grass for some time yet, either."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know's it's true, but I hear you're all to be sent to New York."

"When?"

"To-morrow or next day. I don't know's it's so, but that's the report."

For a moment neither of the boys spoke. The words they had heard seemed for the moment to have dashed all their hopes to the ground. And only a moment before they had been so eager over the possibility of escaping from the hated place. Philip could hear the deep breathing of Reuben by his side, and he was aware that his own disappointment might become apparent, and even the slight hope that now remained be lost by arousing the suspicions of the man before them. By a great effort he succeeded in regaining his self-control and instantly decided that the plan they formed could not be delayed until the following night. The present night promised to be dark and threatening, just such an one as they would select for their purpose, and if only they had the laudanum they desired, might be turned to their advantage. Philip became suddenly cunning in his scheming.

"Well, if we are to go to New York I reckon we'll have to put up with it," he said. "But they won't treat us as well there as you have here, Humphrey, if what I hear is true."

"We've tried to be half decent," grumbled the soldier.

"That you have," replied Philip, eagerly. "We shan't forget you. Here, Humphrey, here's a bottle of applejack that Mrs.—that Mr. Stone brought us. Don't you want a pull at it?"

The soldier eagerly took the bottle and lifting it to his lips drank long of its contents.

"I wish there were more prisoners like you," he said, as he returned the bottle with evident reluctance.

"We've had some good friends that looked after us," responded Philip. "Here's half of a fried chicken. Don't you want it?"

The man grasped the proffered dainty and began hastily to devour it.

"Not much like prison fare, or soldier's fare either, is it?" inquired Philip.

"No," said the man, thickly.

"What's the best thing for the toothache?" inquired Philip, carelessly.

"Toothache? Got the toothache?"

"No, I haven't, but I'd like to get something for Reuben here." It was certainly a stretching of the exact truth, but in their desperate plight Philip shared

the common feeling that in times of war all things were justifiable.

"I don't know. I reckon laudanum's 'bout as good as anything."

"Have you got any?"

"No, not a drop."

"Can't you get us some? I've got some money." As he spoke Philip slipped one of the coins Mr. Stone had given him into the hand of the soldier. "I don't know what it costs, but if you can send out and get us some you can have all the money there is left."

"I'll see what I can do after I've been relieved."

"Can't you do it now? You can send out and get it. Besides," he added, "I've got another bottle of that applejack here, and I'll turn that over to you just as soon as you get the laudanum for us. It's going to be a bad night, and you and the other guard won't object to it, I know you won't. Mr. Stone said 'twas the best his wife ever made."

"I'll see what I can do," said the soldier, evidently strongly tempted by the suggestion of the young prisoner. "You'll have to go in with the other men now," he added, "and just as soon as I get the stuff I'll bring it in to you."

"But I can't give you the bottle there. Some one might see us, and it would make trouble for you."

"You can leave it here, or give it to me now."

"No. I'll live up to my bargain. I'll give you the

applejack if you'll get us the laudanum. If I should leave the bottle out here some one might find it."

"I don't know how I'll get you out. You can't wait till morning?"

"No, no. I want it right away. I'll tell you what to do. You fix it up with the other guard, and I'll give you both bottles, and you can divide with him."

"Well, maybe that's the best way," replied the soldier, dubiously. "I'll do what I can."

"Yes, I know you will," said Philip, as he slipped another coin into the man's hands.

"Perhaps I shall be able to find another one still," he added. "You don't know how much we want the stuff. You've had the toothache yourself, perhaps?"

"Lots of times. Why, one time I had two teeth knocked out—"

Too impatient to listen to the story of the man's mis-haps, Philip interrupted him sharply as he said: "We'll go right in now. Get it just as soon as you can."

"I'll do my best."

The boys made their way at once inside the guard-house and joined their fellow prisoners. There were not more than a score of these now, for the most had been sent to New York. On the vessels by which the soldiers were being brought to Brunswick, the prisoners were sent on their return to the city, and when the guard had informed Philip of the report that all the remaining prisoners were to be sent to the prisons of

the greater city on the following day, he feared that the rumor had good foundations.

Just why it was that he and his brother had not already been sent there he could not understand, but up to the present moment he had been contented to be left in the guard-house at Brunswick, where the prisoners were granted much greater liberty than in the city, and the privations of the sugar-houses were unknown. Here, too, there was no brutal Cunningham to lord it over the wretched men, and though Abraham Patten's fate plainly showed that the most severe of measures might be used when occasion demanded it, still for the most part the men were well treated, and the rigors of prison life were comparatively unknown.

For a time after they had joined their companions neither of the boys spoke, each being busied with his own thoughts. Reuben was highly excited, but Philip was fearful of the effect of the additional coin he had given to the guard. Would it cause him to suspect the eagerness with which he had urged him to secure the laudanum? In that event, every hope of escape he had cherished was already gone.

To Philip, eager and anxious, the slow-moving minutes seemed like hours. The wind was rising, and its weird sounds as it swept through the grated windows were forbidding. Even the apparent indifference of the prisoners to their surroundings irritated him, and he felt his own eagerness to be gone increasing with every

passing minute. To remain longer was intolerable, and yet if his desperate design should now fail, it would mean that not only was release gone, but also that the misery of a long — no man knew how long — confinement in the loathsome prison houses of New York lay before him and his younger brother.

In the dim light he turned and looked at Reuben. The lad had suffered from the few weeks he had passed in the Brunswick jail. His light-heartedness was gone, and his face, despite the excellent food their good friend, Mrs. Van Deursen, had provided, was pinched and drawn. No, in spite of the peril, the attempt was worth all it would cost. If only the man would return, as he had promised, with the laudanum which was so necessary to their scheme.

At last the guard slowly entered the room, and moving with apparent indifference among the prisoners, approached Philip, and in a low voice said: "We're waiting for you outside. You can go out if you want to."

Striving to repress his eagerness, Philip pulled gently on Reuben's arm, and together both boys passed slowly out from the house, and as they drew near the wall they could see the guard before them. The other guard on duty was approaching, and as he perceived both the young prisoners he said: "What are you both doing out here? I wanted only one to come."

"It's my brother who wanted it. He had to come.

It's for him," said Philip, stumbling over his words. "We shan't be here but a minute. We'll both go right back."

"Here's the stuff you wanted," interrupted the other guard. "Where's the applejack?"

"Here, here it is," said Philip, quickly, as he took the laudanum and handed one bottle to the man. The bottle he still held was only partly full, and how to place any of the sleeping potion in the bottle in the hands of the guard became the question. He was able in the darkness to put a goodly part in the half-filled bottle, which he then handed to the second guard.

"Here, let me taste it. I've given you both bottles," said Philip to the first guard.

"All right, lad. It's the genuine article," replied the soldier.

Philip pretended to drink of the contents, and then quickly poured all the remaining laudanum into it; after a brief delay he handed it and the promised coin to the soldier, who was waiting with outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XXV

IN ALBANY STREET

FOR a brief time Philip and Reuben did not move from the position they had taken, but stood watching the two soldiers as they eagerly drank the contents of the two bottles. In the excitement neither made any move to return to the guard-house, though they were fearful every moment that the men would order them to do so. Perhaps under other circumstances both the boys would have had a feeling of disgust for the men who displayed such eagerness for the bottles Mr. Stone had brought that even their sense of duty as soldiers of the king was for the time forgotten. But the custom was so common and both armies suffered so commonly from its effects that it of itself produced no surprise either in Philip's mind or in that of his brother.

But Philip Denton was nevertheless exceedingly anxious. He knew so little of the effects of the drug which he had poured into the bottles that one moment he was fearful that there had not been a sufficient quantity of it to overpower the senses of the guards, and then again he would be greatly troubled lest there had been so much that the lives of the men would be

endangered. In reality, there had been only a few drops of laudanum in the little phial the guard had purchased, but Philip, in his ignorance of its power, was in dire distress between his own anxiety to escape and the fear of the consequences to the men.

All four were standing close to the walls of the guard-house. No one was to be seen in the yard, and the only sounds to be heard were the sighings of the wind and the occasional words of the guards who were still busied with the bottles and apparently unmindful of the neglect of the boys to return to their places inside the jail.

Unaware how much time must elapse before the drug would take effect, distracted by the fears and anxiety of the moment, both boys watched the men before them with an intensity no words could portray. The contents of the bottle that was only partly filled were soon drained, and then the man to whom that bottle had been given turned to his companion and demanded a share of the other also.

"All right," responded his friend. "In a minute," and he once more lifted the bottle to his lips. His companion waited a moment impatiently and then strove to take the bottle from the hands of his friend.

There was a sharp protest, and what threatened to be an altercation. In the confusion Philip turned and whispered to Reuben, "Come on."

Reuben responded, and clinging to the arm of his

brother, drew back toward the guard-house; but when they had passed beyond the sight of the men, they turned, and instead of entering the building, they made a circuit until they could see the dim outlines of the wall that surrounded the yard. Crouching close under its shadows they waited, their hearts beating furiously, and their breathing being fast and labored.

Not even the words of the soldiers could now be heard, and though the boys listened intently, no sound came from the recreant guard. It would not do to delay for long, however, for the other guards would, without doubt, be puzzled by the failure to meet their companions on their rounds, and an investigation would speedily be made. Whatever was to be done must be done quickly, and yet to move before the drug had been given time in which its effects could be produced, would be to destroy every chance of escape.

Reuben was holding his brother tightly by the arm, and neither moved from his position, as they both leaned forward peering intently into the darkness, and listening for the sounds they feared and yet expected to hear. The slow moments passed until neither could conceive how much time had elapsed since they had left the guard-house. It might be minutes, it might be hours, as far as they were conscious of passing time.

At last, unable to endure the strain longer, Reuben whispered: "Let's try it now, Phil. Come on. Don't wait any longer."

Philip assented, and the boys crept along the base of the wall until they came to an angle which they had marked in the afternoon as the place where they would make their attempt. In a few minutes they had gained it, and then pausing only long enough to make certain that thus far they had not been discovered, they prepared to scale the wall.

Silence rested over all the place. A faint light could be seen from one window in the guard-house, but that was all. The darkness was all about them, and the pattering drops of rain gave promise of the coming storm. The trees just outside the wall were swaying before the wind, and their weird sounds were all that broke in upon the stillness of the night. Suddenly the shouts of men in the street not far away broke harshly in upon the silence, and for a moment the hearts of the boys almost stood still in the fear that possessed them; but the men passed on, and their songs and loud laughter could no longer be heard.

"Now! Now's the time, Reuben!" whispered Philip, eagerly. "You go up first and I'll follow. When you get on the top of the wall take off your jacket and drop one end of it to me, and I'll get up somehow. Now, up you go."

Reuben turned to the wall, and his brother stooped and grasped one of his feet. Then lifting hard he helped Reuben to rise until his hands almost grasped the longed-for edge. In a moment, by leaning hard

against the wall, he kept his place, and putting one foot on Philip's shoulder was enabled to get a firm grasp, and quickly drew himself up. For an instant he glanced up and down the street, but nothing to alarm him could be seen. Then hastily removing his jacket, he braced his feet and leaned down, that his brother might seize the part he lowered to him. He could see Philip directly beneath him.

"I can't quite reach it, Reuben," called Philip in a low voice. "Can't you let it down a little lower?"

Reuben made no reply, but endeavored to extend his arms still farther as he leaned out over the top of the wall. In a moment, in his eagerness, he destroyed his balance and fell to the ground inside the wall, almost striking his brother in his descent.

For a moment he was almost benumbed by his mishap, but still he repressed the cry that rose to his lips and staggered to his feet.

"Are you hurt, Reuben?" whispered Philip, anxiously.

"I bruised my shoulder, but I'm all right, I think," responded Reuben.

"Try it again, then. We'll have to be quick about it. Get up here right in the corner this time. Now, then, up you go."

Once more Philip grasped his brother by the foot and hastily lifted him up the side of the wall, and again Reuben gained the top. Philip now quickly removed the heavy shoes from his feet and endeavored to mount

the wall alone, but his efforts were unavailing. For a moment it appeared as if failure was to be their reward, and all their efforts were in vain. There was a lump in Reuben's throat that was almost choking him, but he was still striving to reach down to his brother the sleeve of the jacket. It was near to him, but still too high to enable him to grasp it. Meanwhile, the minutes were passing rapidly and the danger of discovery was becoming greater.

Suddenly Philip stopped, and removing his own jacket, called to his brother to drop to him the one he was holding. As Reuben quickly obeyed, Philip took the two garments and tied the sleeve of one tightly to the sleeve of the other. Then after one failure, he succeeded in tossing the double garment back, and in a moment, again bracing himself with all his strength, Reuben lowered the sleeve to his brother.

"I've got it," whispered Philip. "Look sharp, now! I'm coming."

Holding tightly to the sleeve, Philip began slowly to scale the wall, bracing his feet against the rough bricks, and Reuben pulling with all the strength he could muster. Several times he nearly destroyed his balance and almost fell from the position he was holding, but each time he managed to recover himself. It was impossible for him to use all his strength, for but one arm was free and with the other he was striving to hold fast to the wall.

Slowly and steadily Philip mounted, bracing his feet with every step and holding fast to the garment. The critical moment arrived when Reuben's head was nearly on a level with that of Philip, for the latter now could exert but little strength and could not pull at all. For an instant Reuben wavered, and it seemed as if he must drop to the ground again.

"Hold fast—hold hard," Philip muttered, and then with a quick movement he let go his grasp of the sleeve and seized Reuben's extended arm. It seemed to Reuben as if he must let go his hold. His hand, he knew, must be cut and bleeding, but he clenched his teeth and drove his knees hard against the wall and hung on. By one supreme effort, Philip drew himself up, grasped the edge of the top of the wall, and then, pulling and struggling against the sharp and rough projections, swung his body up, crawled over the top, and dropped to the ground on the other side. Reuben instantly followed his example, and in a moment both brothers were standing on the ground close to the wall, but on the side which they had striven so desperately to gain.

"The jackets are inside," whispered Reuben. "We can't get them."

"We can get along without them. Now, then!" And Philip Denton instantly disappeared in the darkness.

It had been agreed, when the boys had talked over their plan, that if they should succeed in scaling the

wall, that they would separate and by different routes seek the home of Mrs. Van Dyke. Such a course would be safer for both, they had believed, and would be less likely to arouse suspicion if they should chance to meet any stragglers or fall in with the passing red-coats. The first part of this daring attempt had been successful, and now the second part, and in some ways the more perilous, remained.

Waiting for a brief time until Philip had disappeared in the darkness, Reuben departed from the spot where he had been standing. Moving not too rapidly for fear of arousing the suspicion of any one he might chance to meet, he passed down the street, keeping well within the shadows of the tall trees, and with every step listening and peering intently about him.

As soon as he came to a cross street, which was but little more than a narrow passage or alleyway, he turned sharply into that and took the more direct way to Albany street on which Mrs. Van Dyke's house stood. In this narrow way he met a party of four negroes, but he endeavored to appear unconcerned as they passed him by, and to his inexpressible delight they gave no heed to him. The darkness favored him, and his strange appearance passed unnoticed.

As he came out into the larger street, he knew that greater danger of discovery awaited him. It was late in the evening, but there were candle lights still to be

seen in some of the houses. Mrs. Van Dyke's house was at a considerable distance down the street, and there was no way by which he might gain it except to pass directly within the sight of any people who might be abroad. Twice he drew back against the fence that stood at the juncture of the alleyway and the larger street, and waited tremblingly for parties to pass on. His presence was not discovered, and each time a great sigh of relief escaped the lips of the frightened lad. But he must speedily make the attempt or the good woman whose aid he was seeking would be in bed, and to arouse her would be to call down additional perils upon her head, as well as upon his own.

Drawing a long breath he stepped out upon the street and turned in the direction of Mrs. Van Dyke's home. He had gone but a short distance before his heart sank as he perceived that a party of soldiers were approaching, the rain which now was steadily falling apparently having no power to dampen their spirits, for they were noisily singing. Even the words of the song could be distinctly heard as the soldiers bawled them forth:—

“Then plunder, my lads, for when redcoats appear,
You'll meet like the locust, when winter is near;
Gold vainly will glow, silver vainly will shine,
But, faith, you must skulk, you no more shall purloin.”

Then came the words of the chorus in which all the men joined:—

"In folly you're born, and in folly you'll live,
To madness still ready,
And stupidly steady,
Not as men, but as monkeys, the tokens you'll give."

A shout of laughter followed the words and then the leader began again :—

"Then nod your poor numskulls, ye pumpkins, and bawl."

But Reuben waited to hear no more, for darting swiftly across to the opposite side of the street, he passed on rejoicing as he perceived that his presence apparently had not been noted by the brawlers. Perhaps they, too, had been imbibing freely of the Jersey applejack, but it could have contained no sleeping potions, if one was to judge by the uproar they made on Albany street.

Mrs. Van Dyke's house now was not far distant, and Reuben walked rapidly until he could plainly see it. Lights were shining from the front windows of the quaint old house, and evidently the inmates had not retired for the night. As the lad stood for a moment, not knowing just what to do, the front door suddenly opened and an officer descended the steps, but Reuben could see that other officers were within, and that they remained, for the door was quickly closed again. Evidently Mrs. Van Dyke had some of the invaders quartered upon her, as Mrs. Van Deursen also had.

Still his only hope was in her, and passing around

the corner of the house, Reuben followed the side path that led to the door of the kitchen. He was familiar with the place, for he had frequently been there in the days before the soldiers came.

If he might only be able to see the good woman who dwelt there without arousing the attention of the red-coats, who now made it their place of abode, all might yet be well, but there was grave uncertainty as to who would respond if he should knock on the kitchen door. For a time he waited, standing in the shrubbery and watching the house before him. The rain was falling steadily, and he was wet to the skin now. Suddenly one of the lights went out, and realizing that he could no longer delay, Reuben Denton summoned all his courage, and approaching the door, knocked timidly upon it, ready to dart instantly away if his summons should arouse his enemies.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WOOD-CHOPPER

AS no response was made to the summons of Reuben, the lad waited for a brief time hardly knowing what next to do. The rain was falling steadily, and the sounds of the steady dripping from the near-by trees and the noisy little stream of water that ran from the roof into the hogshead that stood beneath the eaves of the house were monotonously depressing. Reuben was wet, and despite the warmth of the early summer evening he was chilled and trembling. All about him the prospect was dreary and forlorn, and had it not been for the greater fear that possessed his heart, he would have been tempted to abandon his purpose and flee from the place.

But something must be done, and both the agreement he had made with his brother to meet him at Mrs. Van Dyke's and the fear of discovery led him on, and summoning all his courage he once more knocked upon the door, this time more loudly than before. He could hear sounds now in the kitchen, and some one was approaching. There was a shuffling of feet as if the person was heavy and was not lifting his feet from the

floor. In a moment the door was opened and a large black woman stood before him, peering curiously at him in the darkness.

"Is yo' de boy what was t' bring de chickens?" she demanded sharply.

"I want to see Mrs. Van Dyke," replied Reuben.

"Mis' Van Dyke don't wan' no chickens," said the black woman, curtly, and prepared to close the door.

"But I want to see Mrs. Van Dyke," protested Reuben, eagerly. "I must see her. She is here, isn't she? Tell her I must see her right away."

The black woman hesitated a moment, evidently impressed by the eagerness of the lad before her. Reuben was peering intently behind her, fearful that his words might be heard and that his coming was already known. To his excited mind, foes were lurking everywhere, and the one purpose in the thoughts of all the redcoats in Brunswick town was the recapture of himself.

"Wha' fo' yo' come t' de kitchen do' if yo' wan' t' see Mis' Van Dyke?"

"Hush! don't talk so loud," pleaded the distracted lad. "I must see her, I tell you. Go and tell her right away. Don't wait a minute."

With a grunt of perplexity or contempt, Reuben could not determine which, the black cook, without inviting him to come in out of the rain, closed the door and turned away. Whether or not she had gone to



"BEFORE HIM STOOD MRS. VAN DYKE."

THE NEW
FORMERY

AS A
TIDBORN

seek her mistress he could not determine, and as he stood waiting on the low doorstep, his heart was assailed by many fears. Meanwhile, the rain fell steadily, and the drip, drip of the trees was weird and lonesome in its monotonous sound.

Suddenly he heard the sound of returning footsteps within, and, prepared to turn and run if the door, when it should be opened, should disclose the face of a foe, he waited in an agony of suspense.

The door was quickly opened, and before him stood Mrs. Van Dyke, while over her shoulder peered the shining face of Dinah, her dusky cook.

"Did you want to see me?" inquired Mrs. Van Dyke, kindly.

"Yes, yes. Mrs. Van Dyke, don't you know me?" said Reuben, eagerly, in a low voice.

"Mercy me! It's Reuben Denton!" exclaimed the woman, as she peered at the lad's face before her. "What—what does this mean?"

"Don't talk so loud," pleaded Reuben. "Yes, it's Reuben Denton, that's who I am. Has my brother Philip been here yet?"

"Phil? Phil Denton? No. I haven't seen him in a year. I thought he—" "

"Yes, yes. Please, Mrs. Van Dyke, don't speak so loud. Phil and I have just escaped from the guard-house. We were to meet here. We thought you would help us. We—" "

"Go right out to the barn, Reuben," said Mrs. Van Dyke, instantly, and as she spoke she peered quickly behind her. "Go, Reuben. I'll come to you soon. Don't wait. Go now," she added eagerly, and at once closed the door.

Reuben turned obediently and sought the low barn that stood in the rear of the house. In a brief time he had withdrawn the wooden plug that held the latch and entered, pulling the door to behind him. The darkness now was intense, and he was unable to discern anything in the building. A long-drawn heavy sigh and a movement as of some one stirring terrified him for the moment, but as the sounds were repeated he was enabled to perceive dimly the outlines of a cow lying in the stable near him. Somewhat reassured, he took his stand by the closed door and waited.

He never knew just how much time had elapsed before Mrs. Van Dyke came, but the good woman at last appeared. Opening the door she entered and then closed the door behind her. Neither could see the face of the other, though Reuben, somewhat accustomed to the darkness by this time, could perceive the outlines of her form as she stood near him.

"I've come, Reuben," she whispered. "Now tell me all about it."

Briefly the lad related to her the story of the taking of Philip and of his own capture, and also described to her the successful attempt they had made to scale the

wall of the prison yard, and his own flight to her home.

As his story was ended, Mrs. Van Dyke, who was a woman of strong sympathies,—perhaps these were intensified by her anxiety for her own two boys who were somewhere in the American camp,—murmured, “Poor lad, poor boy; and you say that Phil was to come here, too?”

“Yes.”

“‘Tis strange he has not yet appeared. Let me see, what is the best thing for me to do. Do you want to try to get past the guards to-night?”

“No; we thought, Phil and I, that our best plan would be to get you to dress us up as wood-choppers and let us start out early in the morning. I hear that there are a good many of these in Brunswick now, and they have no trouble in going out or coming back into the town.”

“That’s a good plan. I’ll fix you up all right,” said Mrs. Van Dyke, cheerily.

“But the first thing we shall have to do will be to wait for Phil to come.”

“Yes, if he ever does come,” replied Reuben, who was now wet and tired and consequently despondent.

“Reuben, you stay right here, don’t try to get away, and I’ll go back to the house and get you something to eat.”

The weary lad offered no objections, and Mrs. Van Dyke departed, speedily returning with a bowl of milk and some corn bread in her hands. Eagerly Reuben

accepted her gifts, and as he ate and drank, the good woman said to him : " I've been thinking of it all, lad. My first thought was that I would take you into the house and put you to bed. I don't believe you have slept in a bed in some time."

" I haven't," Reuben admitted.

" But I decided I wouldn't take that risk. One of the redcoats I have in my house has just come in, and he reports that two men have just escaped from the guard-house. He didn't say who they were, but I thought I knew."

" Did he say anything about Phil ? " inquired Reuben, anxiously.

" He said 'twas reported that one had been caught, but I don't believe he knew anything about it myself. I shouldn't be discouraged, if I were you ; and anyway, you'll have to wait here till morning before you can start, and Phil may come here before that time. I'm going to sit up to-night and keep a lookout for him."

" You're good to us," murmured Reuben.

Ignoring his remark Mrs. Van Dyke, after cautioning him to be careful and advising him to creep into the haymow and cover himself with the hay that then remained, departed for the house, promising that she would come back just as soon as Philip should be heard of, and that in any event she would prepare a disguise for him so that he might depart in the early morning as one of the wood-choppers. As soon as she was gone,

Reuben felt his way to the haymow and creeping under the hay stretched himself at full length.

For a time the effect of the exciting experiences through which he had passed and his anxiety for his brother enabled him to keep awake. He was listening intently for any sound that might indicate that Philip had succeeded in making his way to the house they had agreed upon as a meeting-place. But the steady dripping of the rain from the eaves of the barn and the occasional sighing of the wind were all the sounds he heard. These at last became monotonous, and before he was aware of it the weary lad had closed his eyes and was sleeping.

All through the hours of the night he slept, until in the first faint light of the dawn the loud shrill call of the cocks suddenly awakened him. For a moment he almost failed to realize where he was, but speedily the memory of the events of the preceding night recurred to him, and in a moment he had thrown off the hay and started toward the door. The rain had ceased falling, and judging from the light that crept in through the cracks of the barn, he concluded that the day promised to be fair.

Just at that time the door was opened and Mrs. Van Dyke stood before him. Placing a finger on her lips in token of silence, she deposited the breakfast she had brought with her upon the top of a barrel and then closed and fastened the door behind her.

"Have you heard anything of Phil?" inquired Reuben, anxiously.

"No, not a word," replied Mrs. Van Dyke. "But never mind, my boy," she hastily added as she perceived how discouraged Reuben was by her report, "that doesn't necessarily mean that he has been taken. It may be that he found he could make his way through the lines in the darkness and thought it was better to try that than to come here. 'Twas a good night for such an attempt."

Reuben made no reply, though he shook his head. It did not seem probable to him that his brother would have ignored his promise to meet him at the home of Mrs. Van Dyke if he had been able to do so. No, it was far more likely that Phil had met with some mishap, and likely now was once more with the prisoners in the guard-house, and his latter state would be much worse than ever the former had been.

"You will go just the same," suggested Mrs. Van Dyke, as if she had read his thoughts.

"Yes, I couldn't help Phil any if I should stay here, and I would only make more trouble for you, I'm afraid."

"My trouble is not worth thinking about. It's yours we must not forget."

She did not speak again until Reuben had eaten the breakfast she had provided, and then she said: "I've got an axe and some clothes, and I'll bring them to you. You would do well to put the clothes on and start at once,

for the wood-choppers are usually astir by sunrise and that will soon be here."

Once more she returned to the house and speedily brought him all that she had promised him. Then, bidding him good-by and advising him not to appear to be seeking to escape the notice of any of the soldiers, she departed.

In a brief time Reuben had exchanged his garments for those that had been brought him. A loose blouse, a torn hat, a pair of woollen stockings, and rough shoes and breeches that apparently had seen long and dire service, completed his outfit, and then, swinging his axe over his shoulder, he stepped forth from the shelter, carefully closing the door of the barn as he passed out.

The breath of the summer morning was mild and balmy after the storm of the night, the air was resounding with the songs of the birds, and mindful of it all in spite of the anxiety that possessed him, Reuben approached the street. He glanced uneasily at the windows as he passed the house and halted for a moment before he stepped into the street to make sure that his movements were not observed. Satisfied that he was not seen, he quickly turned and made his way toward King George street.

The ground was soft and the mud was deep, and such mud! Only the Jersey shale is capable of such bottomless, blood-tinged softness as Reuben found that early morning in 1777. But deliberately he stepped into it

until his ankles were deep in it, and then not satisfied, he lifted some in his hands and smeared his face and his clothing. It is doubtful if his own mother would have recognized him had she met him as he made his way along the street that was near to the Raritan.

He was mindful not to quicken his pace as he passed the field covered with the tents of the red-coats, but silence rested over all and he was not seen. The testing time would come when he should attempt to pass the rude earthworks and the sentries, whom doubtless he would find as he drew near the border of the town.

He was soon climbing the low hill, and as he gained its summit he could see the scarlet-clad soldier on duty. Reuben's heart was beating rapidly now, but he endeavored to appear indifferent as he drew near. He even tried to sing the words of the song he had heard in the preceding evening, but the attempt was a failure and he speedily abandoned it. He glanced at the man and then looked at the ground, striving to appear as he believed the rude wood-choppers did when they set forth on their morning task.

"You're late," called the sentry as Reuben approached.

"Be they gone?" inquired Reuben, stupidly.

"Yes, 'they be gone,'" replied the soldier, mimicking the tones as he spoke. "You'll get a good hiding when they get hold of you. I say, look up here," he added,

as he became aware of the mud with which Reuben's face and clothing were covered. "Do you ever have a bath? I've a mind to throw you into the Raritan and leave you there all day."

Reuben was gazing stupidly at the man as if he failed to comprehend what was said. His lower jaw had dropped, his eyes had a stare in their expression that was almost that of a half-wit, and his entire appearance bore out the impression given by his mud-stained clothing.

"Go on, you bumpkin!" laughed the guard. "Go on or Lord Cornwallis will be after you."

Reuben quickened his steps and in a few moments had left the guard far behind him.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE WAY

UPPERMOST in the thoughts of Reuben, and in spite of the fear which was almost overwhelming him, was the consciousness of the large numbers of the redcoats that were now in Brunswick. To his excited mind it had seemed as if acres had been covered by the white tents, and that the soldiers must be almost numberless. Only a few men had been stirring as he had passed the tented fields, and fear had caused Reuben to waste no time, but still the impression was strong upon him, and as he found that he had really passed the outer guards, his first impulse was to run and place the greatest possible distance between him and his enemies.

A moment's thought, however, served to calm him, and trudging along the muddy road, Reuben held steadily to his course. The fear of pursuit was strong, and he looked about him for possible places of refuge as he passed down the road. That the flight of himself and Philip was known long before this time he was convinced, though no confusion had arisen, at least to his knowledge ; but that was largely due to the fact that so many British and Hessian soldiers were in Brunswick

now, and also perhaps in part to the quiet place in which he had passed the night, where the sounds from the street had not been able to penetrate.

The sun by this time had risen above the eastern horizon, and, aware that his perils were increasing with the coming of the day, Reuben quickly increased his pace, his axe still swung over his shoulder, and his feet sinking with every step into the slippery mud beneath him. Suddenly he heard behind him the sounds of angry men, and glancing in his rear, he beheld three horsemen approaching.

In his intense fear he instantly concluded that they must be seeking him, and he was tempted to dart from the road and seek the woods that were only a short distance away. But his flight would be seen and might make his peril still greater, so, concluding to trust to his appearance as a wood-chopper, he kept on, going now more slowly and eager for the men to approach, so that he might know the worst.

As the officers (for their uniforms at once proclaimed their rank) drew nearer, Reuben could hear their angry words as their horses slid and slipped in the mud. Once the horse of one almost lost his footing, and the rider was nearly thrown from his seat, and his rage increased as his companions laughed at his plight.

"A pest on such a country!" exclaimed the man.
"'Tis not worth what it is costing. I would I were back at home."

"We'll soon be there now," said one of his companions, consolingly. "'Twixt Burgoyne and Howe we shall soon have the rebels in a trap."

"Don't you believe it," retorted the first speaker, as he yanked savagely at his bridle. "Everything goes by contraries over here. Why, even the number thirteen is a lucky number in the colonies. At home we hardly dared utter it, but here it seems to be the magical number, at least if what I hear be true."

"What is it you hear?"

"Hear! Why, is not the number of the colonies 'thirteen'? Are there not thirteen stripes in their rag of a flag? Don't the women wear in their breast-knots something to remind one of thirteen? 'Tis always thirteen, thirteen, thirteen, wherever one may look. Why, do you know," and the speaker's voice became low as he spoke in a mock seriousness that well befitted his ill temper, "'tis said the great Washington has thirteen toes on his feet, one having grown since he was made commander of the rebels! 'Tis said that his wife has a cat with thirteen stripes around his tail. And they do say that Philip Schuyler has only thirteen hairs left on his old bald pate, and that his wife, Mistress Catherine Schuyler, braids them with the greatest of care every night for fear that one of them may drop out and the magical number be spoiled. Why, I have even heard that thirteen —"

"You've heard too much," laughed one of his com-

panions. "'Tis time you looked about you as well as behind. Here's a bumpkin now," he added, as the three men halted for a moment as they overtook Reuben. "Perhaps he can tell us what we want to know. Here you!" he called, "can you tell us where Philemon lives?"

For a moment Reuben was so startled by the unexpected question that even the sense of his own fear was lost. What could these officers want of Uncle Philemon? Quickly recovering himself, however, he assumed the stupid expression which his face could take on whenever he desired (it had been a favorite trick of his to do this when he had been a schoolboy, to the great delight of his fellow scholars) and gazing up at them, he said slowly, "Who be he?"

"Philemon! 'Uncle Philemon' they call him! Don't you know him?"

Reuben slowly shook his head and made no response while the men passed him, one of them looking back and laughing as he made some remark to his companions concerning the utter stupidity of the "bumpkin." In a brief time they had passed out of sight, and Reuben with a sigh of relief realized that one more peril had been successfully evaded.

He was near the bank of the river now, and as he looked out over it he longed to be on the opposite shore. It was on that side where his father dwelt, and there was the place he was seeking. For a moment

he stopped, half tempted to try to make his way across, but even while he looked he saw a small boat with four men in it put out from the farther shore and start directly across the river toward the spot where he himself was standing. Instantly his fears returned with redoubled force, and he was aware that the coming of the day meant the coming of new perils also. Already he had faced one, and in the thought of what might still be before him, before he made good his escape to his father's house, he quickly abandoned the road and, looking about him to make certain that he was not seen, he fled across the muddy field to the shelter of the nearest woods.

Unmindful of the trail his footprints left behind him in the soil, he speedily gained the desired shelter and then did not cease from his flight until a goodly distance had been placed between him and the borders of the forest. Then more slowly he resumed his way, for he was familiar with the region, and planned to come into the road at a distance of three miles or more above the place where he had abandoned it.

His very loneliness was a source of comfort to him now, and frequently he stopped to listen to the scoldings of some bird, angry that the solitude should be broken, or to watch the antics of the squirrels that darted chattering among the branches of the tall trees. There was comfort and peace in it all, and the experiences of the past weeks and the perils of the night

now gone seemed dim and far away. Then the thought of his brother Philip recurred to him, and with the thought came the recollection of the anxiety that must be in his mother's heart, and once more he turned and pushed steadily on his way.

He had been walking for an hour or more when he was startled by the barking of dogs, and in a moment two of them broke through the brush and stood facing him, growling and displaying their teeth, but not venturing to approach. Reuben grasped tightly the axe which he still carried in his hands and waited to discover whether or not they would attack him, but in a brief time he heard other sounds in the near-by bush, and was aware that some one was approaching. A low whistle confirmed his suspicion, and a moment later the strange distorted being appeared whom he had seen when Stephen Carle had stopped on the way to Brunswick after the capture at the old covered bridge.

For a brief time the face of the man was expressionless as he gazed intently at Reuben, and the lad could not determine whether the outcome of the unexpected meeting was to be friendly or not. That the man was a friend, or at least an acquaintance, of Stephen Carle certainly did not promise well, and if he should now prove to be unfriendly, Reuben, unarmed save for the axe in his hands, well knew that his chance of escape would be slight indeed from the dogs and their somewhat uncertain master.

At last the strange being spoke, and glancing keenly at the lad, he said :—

“I thought 'twas Philemon. Have you seen him?”

“No,” responded Reuben, puzzled as he recalled the question of the officers he had seen in the road. “No, I haven't seen him. Do you mean Uncle Philemon?”

“The very man. Perhaps the signs were not right and he did not come.” A contortion evidently intended for a smile swept over the face of the misshapen man, and Reuben endeavored to smile in response, but the attempt was a failure.

“How did you like Brunswick?” suddenly demanded the man.

“I — I — didn't like it very well,” stammered Reuben. “How — how did you know I had been there?”

“Didn't you stop to pay your compliments to me?” inquired the man, shrewdly. “A good many men better than you are come to see me. Who do you think made me a visit only week before last?”

“I don't know.”

“No, of course you don't. 'Twas Washington.”

“General Washington?”

“That's just who it was. Folks say he doesn't ever laugh, but he laughed when he was at my house. He just roared. And I laughed, too,” added the little man, sagely.

“What made him laugh?” inquired Reuben. He was watching the man intently, not yet knowing whether

he was a friend or foe. His reference to Washington certainly implied that he might not expect unfriendly treatment at his hands; but there was also the visit of Stephen Carle to be accounted for, and the two were strongly contradictory.

"What made him laugh? He couldn't help it. You see I was bound to do the honors for such a distinguished visitor, and I thought I would roast a pig for him. I had only one left on the place, but as one was all I wanted I decided that that would do, so I tried to catch it. It was lying in the dust in front of my house, but though it would usually follow me around as a dog would, that day it seemed to suspect that I had designs on him, and the minute I started toward him he turned and ran and I was after him. Up and down we ran, and half a dozen times I almost got him, but my hand would slip off and he'd get away. Once I got hold of his tail, and the pig set up a squeal that could have been heard in Brunswick if the Dutch butchers had stopped to listen, which they never do, being all taken up with their own gibberish. Well, the pig got away, though I held on till I thought the tail would come out, I pulled so hard on it, and all the time Washington stood there leaning against the side of my house, and watching us and laughing till it seemed as if he never could stop."

"Did you get the pig?"

"Yes, I got it, but Washington couldn't stay till I cooked it, so I just dressed it and gave it to one of his

men to take back to quarters with him. Roast pig isn't to be had every day, let me tell you!"

"What was General Washington doing at your house?" inquired Reuben, abruptly.

"Don't you wish you knew?" responded the little man, slyly. "Then you got away from the Brunswick jail, did you?" he suddenly asked. "I heard you did."

"You knew I did? Who told you?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"Yes, I do. Did you hear what became of my brother Phil? How did you hear of our escape? Where is he now?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"Tell me where he is," pleaded Reuben, forgetful for the moment of all else. "Is he safe?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

To plead longer was useless, Reuben concluded, and he prepared to move on, though he was still uncertain as to what the strange little man and his dogs might do.

"Come to my house," said the man, abruptly.

"I should like to. I — I — can't do it now," stammered Reuben. "I must go home."

"Come! Come on! I'll show you the way."

Still uncertain, Reuben hesitated. He glanced at the two huge dogs which, at a word from their master, had dropped to the ground, and had lain quiet all through the interview, though Reuben could see that their eyes

were seldom turned away from him, and his hesitation consequently increased. To cope with them successfully in case he should be attacked was doubtful, armed as he was, only with the axe. The little man had no gun, but whether or not he had other weapons was still a problem he could not solve.

"What do you want me to come to your house for?" he inquired after a brief pause.

"Don't you wish you knew?" The strange being appeared to take great delight in the repetition of his childish question, but Reuben's perplexity was in no wise relieved.

"Come! Come on!" he called again, and taking the lad by the hand he started toward his house, first directing the dogs to go on before them.

It would be easy now to break from his grasp and escape, but the apparent friendliness somewhat restored Reuben's confidence, and silently he walked by his companion's side, watchful and ready to make a break for freedom at the first sight of treachery on the part of the man. Neither spoke until they had come to the border of the clearing, and then both stopped for a moment. The dogs had stretched themselves upon the grass in front of the house, a cat was sunning itself on the stone steps, hens were calling to their broods in front of the barn, and the peace of a perfect June day seemed to be resting over all the place.

Abruptly Reuben started as he perceived that a man

was seated on the low piazza partly concealed by the bushes of the climbing rose that grew luxuriantly near to one corner.

"Who is it? Who is it?" he demanded in a low whisper of the man at his side.

"Don't you wish you knew?"

Irritated and frightened as Reuben was, he nevertheless detected a smile of amusement or friendliness on the face of his companion, and forming a sudden resolution, he grasped his axe tightly and advanced toward the house. As he came near, the man on the piazza stepped forward, and for a moment Reuben was overjoyed as he recognized the stranger as Uncle Philemon himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TO THE COVERED BRIDGE ONCE MORE

"**T**HREE sevens and a one. Yes, that must be it!" muttered the old man as he recognized Reuben. "Last night, too, I heard three owls calling together. I knew something would happen to-day, for 'tisn't often my understanding gets fooled."

In spite of his gibberish the old man plainly showed his delight at the meeting, and shook Reuben's hand with a warmth that caused the lad to attempt to withdraw from the bearlike grasp.

"Where's Phil?" Reuben inquired eagerly. "Have you seen or heard anything of him, Uncle Philemon?"

The old man shook his head as he replied: "I thought he was with you, Reuben. That's been the report, that both of you were shut up in the Brunswick jail."

"We were, but we got away. And you haven't seen anything of Phil?"

"Not a thing."

"How is my mother? How are they all at home?"

"Haven't you heard? Don't you know?" said Uncle Philemon, as he stared blankly at Reuben.

"I haven't heard a word. Is anything wrong? What

is it? Tell me! Tell me, Uncle Philemon!" said Reuben, in excitement.

"I reckon they're all right enough, leastwise they were the last time I saw 'em, but that was nigh onto four weeks ago."

"Four weeks ago? Where have you been all the time?"

"I've been at home."

"And you don't know how they are? I must start at once."

"Hold on, Reuben. Your folks left their place four weeks ago, as I was saying. Somehow their buildings took fire one night, and the next morning they all left."

"But where did they go?"

"Not knowing where they went, I can't say."

"And they didn't leave any word?"

"Not with me. Why should they? I reckoned they got word to you, though."

"I haven't had one word from them since Phil and I went to Brunswick." Reuben spoke slowly and as if he hardly comprehended what Uncle Philemon had been saying to him. His brother was lost, and now to learn that his own father and mother had departed from the region, was not only to add to his sorrow but to his perplexity also. What could he do? Where was he to go? Even the very buildings, if the words he had just heard were true, were gone, and not even a place of shelter was now to be called his own.

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The strange little man, in whose home he now was, had been standing near by silently listening to the conversation, and occasionally glancing keenly from the older to the younger man. Not a word had he uttered, and that he was interested in what was being said would have been apparent to any beholder. As he perceived the gloom of Reuben, he said kindly:—

“Reuben Denton, you can stay in my house and welcome.”

“You’re very kind,” responded Reuben. “I—I didn’t know—that—”

“You didn’t know that I was on your side?” laughed the man, completing the sentence over which Reuben himself had stammered.

“No, I didn’t know that you were on our side.”

“Well, I haven’t been till lately. That rascal Steve Carle—”

“Steve Carle?” interrupted Reuben. “Where is he? What’s become of him?”

“Oh, he’s an out and out redcoat now—a regular Britisher. And do you know,” he added, his voice sinking low as he spoke and his eyes beaming bright in his excitement—“he’s a rascal! He’s a thief! He’s a—a—oh, I don’t know what he is, but he’s everything that’s bad. He’s a tempestuous, transmogrified, unadulterated, deep-mouthed, inirritable, turbulent monster! Now you know what he is!”

The little man’s fury had increased as he rolled forth

the meaningless jargon, and the two dogs rose and stood near him, growling and eying the stranger as if they required but a hint from their master to relieve him of the presence, which doubtless was the source of his trouble.

"He's joined the redcoats? Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly so. He had to."

"Why did he have to?"

"Because he stole from me. He took all I had. Steve and I had some deals this year. We—we bought horses and sold them. Steve kept all the money, and now he's gone and joined the redcoats."

"And you wish he had joined the Continentals?"

"I didn't want him to join anything, at least until he had paid me."

A new light had dawned on Reuben's mind as to the relations of this strange being with Stephen Carle, and now he understood certain things that hitherto had puzzled him. But no light was shed on his own problem, and he was silent for a time.

"I suppose you know Lord Howe is in Brunswick, don't you?" inquired the dwarf.

"I didn't know he was there, but I knew there were a good many more redcoats. What's to be done, do you know?"

"I can guess. Lord Howe hasn't come to Brunswick for his health, and Washington hasn't got all his

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troops back here behind Middle Brook on the mountain to show 'em the view from there. At least, that's not my opinion."

"Are the Americans as close by as that? Are they back here on the mountain?" inquired Reuben, instantly aroused by the startling information.

"That's what they are! And there won't be as much distance between the armies before long as there is now."

"There'll be a battle you think?"

"I don't *think* at all. I'm telling you the facts, and you can do your own thinking."

"You're right here between them," said Reuben, slowly. "You'll be crushed. You'll be swept away."

"Here's where I stay," said the little man, doggedly.

"And you want me to stay with you?"

"I don't want anything of the kind. I told you you could stay if you wanted to."

"Uncle Philemon," said Reuben, suddenly, "three British officers passed me back here in the road, and they asked me if I knew where you lived."

"They did? Then I ought to go home at once."

"What for? What did they want of you?"

"I've had some one there 'most every day for a week past. They come to get me to read the signs for 'em. In my opinion they don't know much."

"Philemon," said the dwarf, "you're a fool! You're a crapulous, flagellated, mystified idiot! Don't you know what those men came to your house for?"

"I told you what they came for," responded Uncle Philemon, unabashed by the long words of the dwarf. "They know me."

"Yes, they do know you, and that's just the reason they use your foolishness. They come to your place because it's a good hiding-place, and they're trying with all their might and main to find out about the camp of Washington. They know that he hasn't got eight thousand men up there on the mountain for the sake of showing them the scenery. They know, too, that he hasn't posted Arnold with two thousand more down on the Delaware for the fun of it. They know that just as well as they know that Lord Howe and Lord Cornwallis have got together almost eighteen thousand men over here at Brunswick. They've got their eyes open, Philemon, and they're just using you and your house for what they want of it."

"But they *asked* me about the stars. Yes, sir, they asked me about them."

"If I remember aright, this boy here and his friend Jacob Goodnow helped you watch the stars, too, one time. If I'm not mistaken, there was a pig there, too, and he helped you to see stars—but they weren't in the sky," he added soberly.

Uncle Philemon flushed deeply at the reference, and even Reuben smiled as he recalled the plight of the old man, when the pig had pushed the props from out the rude platform, and the star-gazer had taken his unex-

pected fall. But what now surprised him most of all was the knowledge possessed by the little man. How did he know just how many men Washington had with him? and the numbers of the British and Hessians in Brunswick? — apparently he was as well informed concerning them as he was as to the Americans.

"What's Lord Howe planning to do?" Reuben inquired.

"Don't you wish you knew?" retorted the dwarf, returning to his childishness once more.

"Yes, I do," asserted Reuben, sturdily. "I don't believe you know yourself."

"I don't."

"Then you can't tell me or any one else."

"I don't know; but even if I don't, I shan't have to go to Uncle Philemon and his tricks to find out. I don't *know*, but I can guess. What city is it that lies off beyond the Delaware?"

"Philadelphia."

"Precisely. Well, would the redcoats like to get that town?"

"I think they would."

"Precisely. Well, it isn't very far away, is it?"

"No."

"And Lord Howe has an army of eighteen thousand men just now in Brunswick?"

"That's what you say."

"That's what I know. Do you think he'll try to get

past Washington's ragamuffins over here, and *do* you think he'll push on toward Philadelphia? Now, do you?"

"Why, yes. That looks reasonable. It certainly does."

"And *do* you think Washington will try to keep Howe back?"

"He'll try to."

"Maybe he will and maybe he won't. There's two sides to that question."

"Two sides? I don't understand. I don't see what you mean."

"John Burgoyne has an army up north, and I reckon he'd like to have Howe come to help him; but if his lordship can be kept here, that won't hurt Phil Schuyler or Horatio Gates, will it?"

"No," replied Reuben, thoughtfully. "I think I see what you mean. Don't you think there'll be a battle here? Don't you think our men will fight?"

"Fight? Yes! They'll fight if they get the right chance. No doubt about that."

"But what am I to do?" said Reuben, suddenly recalled to his own predicament. "It seems my father and mother have gone and the place is burned. I don't know where they are, nor does any one else, either. Then Phil hasn't shown up, and I'm afraid he didn't get away. How did you hear of our escape?"

"Don't you wish you knew? Reuben Denton, can't

you think of any one who would be likely to know where your folks went? Come now, think hard."

"Yes," replied Reuben, suddenly, as the thought of Mr. Coddington flashed into his mind. "Yes, yes. I know just where to go and what to do. I'll start right away."

"Hold on. Now think twice. Where's Washington's army?"

"You said it was back of Middlebush and of Bound Brook."

"Right. Now where's Howe's army?"

"That's in Brunswick."

"Right again. Now if that's so, what do you think the men who have been living along the river between Brunswick and Bound Brook will be likely to do?"

"I think I know what Mr. Coddington will be likely to do," responded Reuben. "But then," he added, as he thought of Hannah, "I don't know whether he'd leave home or not."

"He'd leave. As for the girl, she'll be looked after, you needn't be afraid that *he* won't see to her."

"Then I'd better go first to the army and try to find him, and see if he can't tell me where my father and mother are," said Reuben, thoughtfully.

"Partly right, partly wrong. Reuben, do you remember the old covered bridge?"

"I'm not likely to forget it."

"Go there. You're welcome to stay here, but you'd better go."

"But Stephen Carle knows about it," suggested Reuben, "and I don't know how many more. Besides —" He paused abruptly as the fate of Abraham Patten occurred to him.

"Reuben, you go! I'll give you some dinner and something to eat to take with you. If it hadn't been for Steve Carle going back on me the way he did, I wouldn't have done a thing. But he's joined the red-coats, and I'm going to be on the other side. That's just what I'm going to do! Steve Carle's a superincumbent, permeated, sub-contrary antipodes, that's just what he is, and I don't care who knows it, either!"

"But why should I stop at the bridge? I might just as well go on to the place where the army is as to stop there. I don't see that I shall gain anything."

"Phil," suggested the little man, tersely.

"Phil? I don't understand. What's he got to do with it?"

"I thought you wanted to find out about him."

"I do."

"Well, you can't, but I can."

"You can? I don't see how?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"What'll you do?"

"I'll find out about him, and bring you word at the bridge to-night or early to-morrow morning."

"And Uncle Philemon?"

"He'd better go with you. He'll be no help to me."

"To the old covered bridge?" demanded the old man, sharply.

"Precisely."

"Yes, Uncle Philemon," said Reuben, who had decided to do as the little man had suggested. "We'll start late this afternoon, and we can stand it there for a while."

"Then I'll leave both of you here," said the dwarf. "You'll be all right, and I must be off if I'm going to do my part."

In a brief time the little man departed, taking with him one of his dogs. It was late in the afternoon when Reuben and Uncle Philemon started for the covered bridge. Despite his decision, the lad was perplexed over the words of the dwarf, and his heart had many misgivings as to the wisdom of heeding the suggestions he had made. But he did not refer to his feelings, and near sunset he and his companion drew near to the bridge.

The rude structure appeared more sombre than ever it had, as the lengthening shadows shot across it, and Uncle Philemon's uneasiness was not only apparent, but contagious as well, and when Reuben had climbed into the well-known place, and dropped the long leather strap which he found there to his companion, and assisted him to join him, he himself was sharing in the nervous dread of Uncle Philemon as he hastily closed and barred the well-known trap-door.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ADVANCE

THE dusk had deepened and the evening was at hand when Reuben and Uncle Philemon had gained their place of shelter. The noisy waters underneath the old bridge rolled on their way, mingling their sounds with those of the tree-toads and the occasional call of some night bird. The dim light that penetrated their hiding-place served to increase the feeling of loneliness that possessed both men, and for a time neither of them spoke. Thoughts of what had recently occurred in the very place where they then were were in the minds of both, and Reuben especially was far more anxious than he cared to explain.

Again and again he blamed himself for having listened to the suggestion of the strange being from whose home they had just come, and yet here he was, and until there should arise some further cause of alarm, here he would remain. Occasionally he glanced at Uncle Philemon, but the old man apparently was unmindful of his presence as he sat with his head bowed and his hands clasping his knees.

Suddenly upon the stillness of the night rose the

sound which before had struck terror to the hearts of both Reuben and Uncle Philemon. Prolonged and weird, the cry seemed to come from beneath the very timbers of the bridge itself and to fill all the region with the resounding echoes. For a moment, Reuben was leaning forward listening intently, while Uncle Philemon rose to his feet, and muttering some words strange to his companion, grasped Reuben's arm tightly and was trembling in every part of his body. The weird cry ceased as abruptly as it had begun, but still the two men waited and listened for the sounds to be heard once more. And in a brief time the cry again awoke the echoes of the bridge and the valley.

As the sounds rose and fell, Reuben abruptly laughed aloud, but his companion only clutched his arm the more tightly as he said: "Be silent, boy! Don't tempt the powers of evil by your foolishness."

But Reuben only laughed more heartily, for in the relief which had come to his tense nerves he was unmindful even of the peril of the place, and if any one had been near, he certainly would have heard the peals of laughter that issued from the hiding-place.

"Reuben! Reuben Denton!" exclaimed Uncle Philemon, sternly, "are you daft?"

"I think I must have been, and you, too, and Jacob, and every one," he replied with difficulty.

"I don't see," muttered the old man, completely mystified by Reuben's words and manner. "To me it's no

laughing matter. Be quiet!" he added, as the sounds began again, and almost convulsively he clutched Reuben's arm once more.

"Oh, Uncle Philemon," Reuben responded, "just think of it! What fools we've been."

"We are, you mean."

"Yes, are; and have been, too. Don't you know what that was?"

The old man was silent, but his grasp relaxed and he did not move.

"Oh, to think of it, Uncle Philemon! To think that we were such blockheads as not to know the bellow of a Jersey calf when we heard it. And that's all it was. There! Do you know it now?" he added, as the sound was heard again.

Still the old man did not respond. Perhaps words had failed him.

"Just think of it," began Reuben again. "First, we were so scared by seeing Abraham Patten climb up the old strap, that we thought he must be a ghost. And then, when a bull bellowed, we just knew it must be a call from the pit. If we'd had any of our senses about us, we'd have known in a minute what it all was; but when one is looking for ghosts, why, everything is ghostly, I reckon. Now, Uncle Philemon, aren't you ashamed of yourself? First you have a pig to help you see stars, and then you get a calf to scare you into believing that you've heard a call from the bottomless pit."

"But Abraham Patten was hanged. You, yourself, said so," protested Uncle Philemon, feebly.

"Yes, he was hanged," replied Reuben, soberly. "But what has that to do with this bellowing down here under this old bridge?"

As the old man made no reply, Reuben said, "I just believe it's the same with all your signs, Uncle Philemon. If we could only just find out about them, we'd see that they were all like the squealing of a pig or the bellowing of a bull."

"No, no. You're mistaken, Reuben. You are, indeed, you are. Now, if you—"

"Well, anyway, we've found this one out. And how scared you were, too." Reuben made no reference to the unseemly fear that he certainly had shared in; but now that the weird cries at the old bridge had been explained, he felt that his discovery afforded him an opportunity to assert himself, and he was not slow to accept it.

"It may not have been the same thing when we heard it before," suggested Uncle Philemon.

"Nonsense! We were scared out of our wits and ready to be frightened by anything. 'Twas the very same thing. I know it was."

Somewhat impressed if not entirely convinced by Reuben's words, Uncle Philemon resumed his seat on the floor and the silence returned. Not even Reuben was able to shake off the feeling of anxiety that soon

possessed him. The ignorance of the place to which his father and mother had gone, his uncertainty as to his brother's safety, and more than all the peril from which he himself and his companion had not yet escaped were not to be shaken off lightly. As the moments passed his anxiety increased, but Uncle Philemon apparently recovered his spirits as his young companion became depressed.

Unable longer to remain silent the old man at last said :—

“ There are a good many redcoats at Brunswick now, Reuben.”

“ Yes, I suppose there are.”

“ And a good many ‘ Dutch butchers,’ too.”

“ Yes.”

“ It’s a strange old place, Brunswick is.”

“ Yes.”

“ Do you know that they used to call it ‘ Prigmore’s Swamp ’ ? ”

“ No. Did they ? ”

“ Yes. Seventy-five or eighty years ago, that’s what they called it. The place where the town is now was all covered over with woods, and the proprietor was a man named Prigmore. That’s why they called it Prigmore’s Swamp. He owned it.”

“ I didn’t know it.”

“ Well, it’s true. Then the first settler there, at least the first one that any one knows anything about, was a

man named Cooper, Daniel Cooper. He lived right down there where the post-road crossed the river, and he kept the ferry. They used to call the ferry Inian's Ferry."

"I thought you said the man's name was Prigmore."

"I did, but he was the proprietor; but this Inian and his wife had a right to keep the ferry as long as either of them lived. I've heard about it a great many times."

"Was he a Dutchman?"

"No, no. The Dutch didn't come there till about 1730. The first white people came over from Long Island. But along about 1730 some Dutch families came there from Albany. Do you know they brought with them the bricks and tiles they used to build their houses? Well, they did, just as 'tis said before them the old Dutchmen used to have their bricks and tile all sent over from Holland. Well, they built some houses on the post-road, not far from the river, and then changed the name to Albany street."

"Yes," assented Reuben, as for a moment he recalled his own flight along the street to which Uncle Philemon referred. "Yes. I know the street."

"'Tis said it was called for a time French street, in honor of Philip French, Esquire, who owned a lot of land just to the north of it. But the Dutchmen had their own way and changed it to Albany street, from the name of the town up on the Hudson, from which they had come. Then afterward they called the place

Brunswick, though up to that time every one used to speak of it as 'The River.' "

"I thought you said 'twas called Prigmore's Swamp."

"I did; but that was only the name of the track along by the bank of the Raritan. The rest of it—"

Suddenly Uncle Philemon ceased, for to the ears of both had come a sound that was startling, and the early days of Brunswick were instantly forgotten. A man on horseback was heard far up the road, and it was evident that he was approaching the bridge. Reuben and his companion listening intently endeavored to peer through the cracks of the bridge, but the darkness hid all things from their sight. But the sounds of the swiftly riding horseman came nearer and nearer, and in a brief time the rider had entered the covered bridge, and the din raised by the hoof beats of his horse became almost unnaturally loud. The loose planks rattled, and the noise made by the running horse was now directly beneath the watchers. They obtained a momentary glimpse of a shadowy form speeding away beneath them, the din increased as the rider did not slacken his pace even for a moment, and then the sounds changed as the horse passed out from the bridge and struck the ground on the sloping hillside beyond. For a brief time the horseman could still be heard, but the sounds gradually became fainter and more indistinct, and then ceased altogether, as horse and rider disappeared in the blackness of the night.

Uncle Philemon was the first to break in upon the silence, as in a low whisper he said, "What was that, Reuben?"

"That," responded Reuben, slowly, "was a horse and a man on horseback."

"Yes, yes. I know. But who was he? What was he?"

"I don't know. He was coming from the direction of Bound Brook, and it was plain from the way he was going that he was in haste. I don't believe there was any grass growing under the feet of that horse."

"Perhaps he was being chased," suggested Uncle Philemon.

"That's so," replied Reuben, quickly. "I hadn't thought of that. Maybe he was. We can tell pretty soon if we keep watch."

Both became silent again as they waited and listened for the sounds of some one in pursuit of the fleeing horseman. An owl sent forth his lonesome cry from a corner of the bridge, the tree-toads increased the volume of their nightly chorus, the lapping of the waters beneath the rude bridge continued, but otherwise the silence was unbroken.

An hour must have elapsed, and still Reuben and Uncle Philemon listened for the sounds that might indicate the pursuit of the man who had ridden so furiously across the bridge.

Suddenly the old man clutched Reuben by the arm and whispered: "There! Hear that!"

Faintly to Reuben came the regular sounds of the footfalls of a running horse, but the faint noise arose from the direction in which the man had disappeared. But the sounds were there, there could be no mistaking them. Nearer and nearer they came, clearer and more distinct they sounded, and then with a clatter of hoofs and a rattling of the loose timbers of the bridge, the horseman dashed across the structure and in a moment was gone. The labored breathing of the horse could be distinctly heard as he passed directly beneath the listening men, and it was evident that the pace at which he was running must have been maintained for a considerable length of time. In all probability it was the same man who had crossed the bridge an hour before this time and was now returning. He was riding in the direction of the American camp, too, but whether he was friend or foe neither could determine.

But his coming had served to startle both Reuben and Uncle Philemon, and it was long past midnight before either was able to regain his former state of calm. No one else had been heard or seen, and the strange little man who had promised to return, either in the night or by the coming of the dawn, had not put in an appearance.

Wearied by the events of the day, Reuben at last fell

asleep, but his companion remained awake throughout the night, watching and waiting for he knew not what, and yet not daring to close his eyes.

When Reuben awoke, the first faint streaks of daylight were already appearing. As the lad opened his eyes and looked about, the recollection of what had occurred in the night flashed upon him, and sitting quickly erect, he remarked, "I must have been asleep, Uncle Philemon."

The old man nodded his head, but made no other reply.

"It was only for a minute. I just closed my eyes and that was all," said Reuben, positively; but Uncle Philemon only smiled and still remained silent.

Reuben arose and peered out through the cracks of the boards. He could see far away in every direction, and in the early morning light the scene was one of great beauty. The trees were nodding in the light breeze, the meadow lands were clothed in bright green, and the songs of the birds could be heard on all sides. Impressed by the sight, he was about to declare that he was going to leave the shelter for a brief time and bathe in the waters of the stream, when his ears caught a sound that instantly caused him to listen intently. The sound was repeated, clearer and more distinct, and in a moment both he and Uncle Philemon were lying flat on the boards and peering through the holes in the floor at the scene beneath them.

And the sight upon which they gazed was indeed one that might well cause their faces to become pale and their hearts to beat rapidly, for directly beneath them was a great force of redcoats, marching in regular order and evidently moving with some great purpose in the minds of the leaders.

And still they came. The burnished brass and silver of their equipments flashed in the morning light, the plumes nodded in the air, and the entire appearance was marvellously impressive. Horse and foot, the sturdy column still advanced, until it seemed to Reuben that it was almost countless. Lord Cornwallis himself was with the troops—short, thickset, his hair tinged with gray, his face agreeable to look upon and attractive with its regular features, but as neither Reuben nor Uncle Philemon had ever seen him, both failed to recognize him. All that they seemed to perceive was that thousands of the redcoats were marching across the bridge, and the cannon which they dragged with them, as well as the arms they bore, plainly indicated the serious nature of the movement they had undertaken.

And serious indeed it was. On that morning of June 14, 1777, after leaving General Matthews with two thousand men to guard Brunswick, Lord Cornwallis with eight thousand men in his column had set forth for Hillsborough, while General de Heister with a second column of the same number of men was

advancing toward Middlebush. And what the purpose of the advanced movement was, every man in the ranks was aware, and Reuben Denton and Uncle Philemon, peering with a strange fascination and fear down upon the long lines as they marched across the old covered bridge, also had no difficulty in understanding what the advance of the British indicated.

CHAPTER XXX

IN AND OUT OF THE CAMP

WITH the rhythm and regularity of the waves of the sea, the forces had marched across the old bridge, and Reuben and Uncle Philemon, almost fascinated by the sight, had hardly moved from their position as they had watched the long lines pass underneath them. But at last the rear-guard had gone, and all the troops were hidden from sight by the trees along the roadside.

With a sigh, Reuben arose, and turning to Uncle Philemon said: "I'm not going to stay here any longer. I'm going to cut across the country and get word to our men."

"They know it already; lad, you need have no fears as to that. You'd better wait here till you hear something about Phil."

"I can't wait any longer. I should have heard before this if there was anything to hear. Won't you come too, Uncle Philemon?"

"No, no. The signs are all against it. I couldn't possibly go. No, no, indeed!"

"All right then. Here I go," and without another

word, Reuben swung himself free from the cross timbers, and dropped to the floor beneath.

Swiftly he followed the direction in which the troops had moved until he came to the well-known fork in the road, and there he turned and made his way through the forests, abandoning the open highways.

He was running, heedless of the branches that snapped under his feet, intent only upon gaining the camp of the American soldiers, and bringing them the word of the coming of the redcoats. On and on he fled until at last, almost breathless, his lips parched and dry, and his breath coming in gasps, he perceived before him a spring of bubbling water. The sight served to recall him to himself, and throwing himself upon the ground, he drank long and deeply of the spring.

Refreshed by the draught, he nevertheless bethought himself of the food which was in his pocket, the gift of the strange little man the preceding evening, and with the thought came also a great feeling of hunger. Seating himself on the bank, he hastily ate his breakfast, and then resumed his flight, running now at a slower speed than he had used when he departed from the bridge.

In the course of an hour he had passed the place near Quibbletown, where the engagement had occurred; but he kept steadily on toward the mountains that lay in the rear of the little settlement, assured that somewhere there he would find the men whom he was seek-

ing. Nor had he a long distance to go, for soon he came upon the outposts of the American army, and his appearance, as well as the word he hastily spoke, at once proved a passport, and he was permitted to enter within the lines.

Bodies of men were now seen, and the rude huts they used as abodes were visible on every side. Here and there some of the soldiers were busied about a fire, which had been started in a rude fireplace, cooking their food, and laughing as they joked with one another. There was no evidence of fear or excitement to be discovered, and Reuben Denton eagerly kept on his way, wondering what these same men would say if they too knew the alarming intelligence of which he was the bearer.

He was following a wide pathway, evidently used by the teams, when suddenly he glanced up and beheld Mr. Coddington approaching swiftly on horseback. Heedless of the lad, the man was about to pass him—for he was riding rapidly—but Reuben quickly called to him, and startled by the unexpected hail, Mr. Coddington instantly stopped his horse, and turning partly about in his saddle, looked intently at the lad.

"Is it you, Reuben Denton?" he said, his surprise betraying itself in the tones of his voice.

"Yes, yes," responded Reuben, eagerly, as he ran quickly to the side of the horse. "Mr. Coddington," he began abruptly, "the British are coming! I saw

thousands of them crossing the old covered bridge back here. They're bound for the camp ! I know they are !"

"Tell me about it, Reuben," said Mr. Coddington, quietly.

Thus bidden, Reuben related his story, aided by an occasional question ; and as soon as the brief account had been given, Mr. Coddington turned his horse sharply about, and said, as he prepared to ride swiftly back in the direction from which he had just been coming, "I doubt not 'tis all known, but I shall carry your word, lad."

"Do you know where my father and mother are ?" called Reuben, as Mr. Coddington darted away.

"Afterward," was all the word Reuben could hear, as the man departed.

"Where's Bob ?" called Reuben, almost in despair.

Mr. Coddington, without turning his head, pointed toward his left, and then, in a moment, had disappeared from sight.

Satisfied that his message would now be delivered, and that his duty was ended as far as that was concerned, Reuben, nevertheless, felt somewhat hurt at the abrupt manner of his friend, and his failure to receive any reply to the question which then was uppermost in his own mind. Still, he knew the regiment to which his brother belonged, and now that he was free to seek him out, he resolved to go to him at once. By dint of a few inquiries, he was able to secure the infor-

mation he desired, and about a half-hour afterward he found his older brother in the place where the militia were encamped.

For a moment neither spoke, as the two brothers clasped hands and gazed each into the face of the other. Then in a moment Bob said eagerly: "Where's Phil? Is he with you?"

"No," replied Reuben, as he shook his head. "I didn't know but I might find him here."

"I haven't seen him since the fight at Bound Brook. We had word that both of you were shut up in the Brunswick jail."

"We were," replied Reuben, and he related briefly the story of their escape. "Now tell me where mother and father are. I hear their place has been burned."

"It has," said his brother, sadly. "A party of Hessians came there one day for forage, and not finding what they wanted, or as much as they wanted, they set fire to the barns, and it wasn't long before every building was burned up. They claimed it was an accident, but there have been too many such fires to call them 'accidents.' It's what a good many have had to go through," he added bitterly. "The British say they'll make it up all right, but perhaps they will and perhaps they won't. I don't believe anything will be done about it."

"But where are mother and father?"

"Oh, they managed to save the one horse we had left,

and they got away with a few things. The darkies followed them. Cato was right in his element as he got them together, and they went over to the home of a cousin of ours, back of Morristown."

"And they're there now?"

"Yes; I hear from them almost every day."

"How?"

"Through Mr. Coddington."

"Mr. Coddington? I don't understand," said Reuben.

"Why, when father and mother came over there he had them take Hannah along with them. His place is shut up, burned up, too, for all that I know, and he manages to get over there pretty often. It's a part of his work, you know."

"No, I don't know. How is it a part of his work?"

"Why, don't you know? He's one of the scouts, though that isn't just what they call him," he added, as his voice became lower and he glanced nervously around him. "He manages to find out what is going on, and he helps call out the men, too. There are a good many men here now that he urged to come. I don't know how long they'll stay, though."

"Yes, I see," replied Reuben, slowly.

He was thinking of the time when he had discovered Abraham Patten dressed in the uniform of a British soldier in Mr. Coddington's house. It was plain now, and he understood the cause of Mr. Coddington's anxiety. Doubtless the unfortunate spy had used his house as a

part of his plan, and had disclosed to him much of the information he had secured, and Mr. Coddington himself had been the bearer of it to the camp of the Americans. Yes, it was all clear now, even the strange room in the loft of the old covered bridge; for that, too, had been a meeting-place, and doubtless the rumors which Uncle Philemon had scattered as to the uncanny sights and sounds there had been fostered in the hope that the place would be avoided, and that the secret dealings might be carried on more successfully. He thought of the fate of the unfortunate Abraham Patten, and wondered whether or not Mr. Coddington knew what had befallen him. Doubtless he was already aware of that, but investigations must be left until another time, for the present moment was filled with its own perplexing problems.

"How is mother?" inquired Reuben, after a brief pause.

"She keeps up her heart wonderfully well. If she could only find out that you were here and all right, and what had become of Phil, I have no doubt that she would be in high spirits, for she doesn't seem to mind the other troubles very much. But the greatest change is in father. You'd hardly know him, Reuben."

"Why? How? What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know he never was very enthusiastic over the war, and he didn't like to have us boys in the army at all. But now, since the place was burned, he's the

warmest kind of a Whig. He said you could join if you ever got out of the prisons — you see, they thought you and Phil must have been taken to New York — and if he was only stronger, he says, he'd shoulder a musket and come along too."

"Did he say that?" inquired Reuben, eagerly.

"Yes, he did. I don't know but that Hannah Coddington helped him, too, to make up his mind," added Bob, with a smile. "She's the warmest little patriot in Jersey."

"Yes," replied Reuben, a slight color tingeing his cheeks as he spoke. He was thinking of Hannah as she had been when he had last seen her, dressed in the garb of a man, and driving a Hessian prisoner before her at the point of her bayonet.

In spite of the excitement which Reuben's report of the advancing army of redcoats aroused in his brother's mind the two talked on, wondering what would be done, and if the British would attack the place where the little American army was stationed.

The story of the escape from the jail yard at Brunswick was told in all its details, and the means Phil had employed at the indirect suggestion of their good friend Mrs. Van Deursen, were highly approved by the older brother. What the result had been when the escape had been discovered and what punishment was inflicted upon the guards who had drunk of the applejack in which the drops of laudanum had been placed, were all matters of conjecture, for no certain knowledge,

then or afterwards, was ever obtained. All that was learned was that the share Mrs. Van Deursen had had in the plot and in supplying the required means through the good offices of the Tory who had given them money, was never suspected.

The story, too, of the tragic fate of Abraham Patten was also dwelt upon, and many were the incidents both could recall of what the man had done, unsuspected at the time, but now, in the light of later events, all made clear as a part of the general plan by which he worked.

But meanwhile a feeling of restlessness and uncertainty began to manifest itself among the soldiers. Rumors of the advance of the British began to be circulated, and the men were somewhat divided in their opinions as to whether the generals would decide that the Americans should go down from their stronghold and meet the enemy in the plains, or should remain where they were and receive the attack which no one for a moment doubted would be made. For what had the redcoats left Brunswick if it was not for that very purpose?

Outnumbering the American troops as they did more than two to one, it was only natural to infer that a battle of some kind must speedily occur, and in the midst of the prevailing sentiment the excitement steadily increased.

It was the middle of the afternoon, when Mr. Coddington rode into the camp, and seeking out the boys,

explained to them that the report Reuben had brought of the advance of the British had been confirmed, and that their whereabouts were known, and their movements were being carefully watched. With a smile, he disclaimed any opinion as to what was likely to occur, and in the end he insisted that Reuben should take the horse he then was riding and proceed at once to the place where his father and mother were. Though the lad hesitated, Mr. Coddington was insistent, and the result was that Reuben soon departed from the camp, riding the horse which his friend had provided, and about dusk that very day arrived at the house in which his father and mother and his friend Hannah Coddington were then staying.

Of the welcome and the meeting it is needless to write. The only cloud was the unexplained failure to hear of Phil, but even that apparently had no power to restrain the zeal and determination of Mr. Denton. Reuben was hardly able to account for the change that had come over his father. All his complainings were ended, and only one purpose possessed him, and that was that the struggle must now be fought and to the end.

Whether or not it was the losses he had suffered that had wrought the change, Reuben could not determine, but the change itself was apparent. It was his father himself who suggested his entering the army with his brother, and his mother, though her face seemed to be

strangely pinched and drawn as she spoke, added her own encouragement. As for Hannah, her eyes sparkled as she too bade Reuben go to join his brother, and perhaps her words were not those that had the least effect upon the lad.

And yet the willingness of none was born of his ignorance of the peril that lay before him. It was simply a part of the desperate determination that had seized upon the patriots, and even the women and the girls were among the most ardent of the defenders of the land. The silent part was theirs, but it was no less a true and great part of the now famous struggle.

Early in the following morning, Reuben went back to the camp, leaving behind him the group of three that stood upon the low piazza and watched him as long as he could be seen as he rode down the road. There was a lump in his throat and a strange mist before his eyes, but not for a moment did he think of turning back. Before him lay danger and suffering, but he, like many another lad of his own age, must take his share in bearing the hardships. When he entered the camp about noon time and gave back his horse to Mr. Coddington, he speedily discovered that the excitement of the preceding day had been greatly increased, and that Bob and all the men in the militia were able to talk of little else but the stirring events which had occurred during Reuben's absence.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN

AGAIN and again Lord Cornwallis had endeavored to tempt the Americans to leave their stronghold on the mountain side and come down into the plain to give him battle. Forces had been sent within sight of the soldiers, and many were eager to rush from their shelter and properly to chastise the impudent redcoats. But Washington, wiser than all, was not to be moved. Realizing as he did the weakness of his inexperienced forces, he permitted all the manoeuvres of Lord Cornwallis to pass by unnoticed, and doggedly held to his determination, that if the British desired to fight they must come where he was.

But the English general had not forgotten Bunker Hill, and though he was eager for a battle, he had no desire to expose his men to the peril of striving to make their way up the rough hillside in the face of such a merciless fire as would be poured into his ranks from the men stationed in the higher and better position.

Accordingly, after many futile attempts to induce the Americans to come down into the plain, at last, when five days had elapsed, Cornwallis led back his troops to

Brunswick town. To pass on toward Philadelphia, and leave Washington and his army in his rear was not to be thought of, and as it was impossible to draw his enemy into an engagement there, he did the only thing left for him to do, and accordingly withdrew all his troops into Brunswick.

Great was the rejoicing among many of the American soldiers when the news of the return of the British was confirmed. Many who had been fearful were now made bold, and openly boasted that the redcoats were afraid to hazard an attack; but others, better informed, shook their heads and bade their comrades wait.

It was June 19th when Cornwallis returned to Brunswick, and three days afterward, early on Sunday morning, June 22d, came the report that the British were all departing from Brunswick for Amboy, and this could mean nothing else than that the redcoats, discouraged, were leaving New Jersey and returning to New York. Among the Americans the report aroused great joy, but the leaders, ever fearful of a foe whose powers and ability they did not underestimate, were still guarded and careful, fearing some trap into which their very confidence might lead them.

Nevertheless, when the rumor of the departure of the British was confirmed, some of the militia were sent hastily to harass the rear of the retiring army, and inflict such damage as lay within their power. Soon the greater part of the army also withdrew from the strong-

hold in the hills and took a position back of Quibbletown, ready to follow up any advantage the militia might gain, or to return to their former position if occasion demanded it.

Among the militia moved Reuben Denton at his brother's side. It was new work for him, and he was strongly excited, while a feeling of fear was by no means lacking. Silently, steadily, the rude soldiers made their way through the woods and over the rough roadway. The day was intensely warm, and the "songs" of the Jersey mosquitoes were in the air, increasing the discomfort of the untried soldiers. But the men followed the retiring army until suddenly there was a report that the redcoats had returned and were preparing to give battle to the overbold militiamen. Then there was excitement, and fear, too, for the matter of that, in the force of which Reuben was a member, but, nevertheless, a stand was made, and the hardy patriots prepared to defend themselves.

The two or three cannon they had brought were made ready, and tremblingly but unflinchingly the men waited. Soon the redcoats appeared, a part of the rear-guard which Lord Cornwallis himself was commanding, and then the pop of the muskets began. The cannon had been fired, but apparently without inflicting any serious damage. Reuben, his face white but a grim determination expressed on every feature, was firing from behind a tree, and as the sounds of the guns increased in vol-

ume he could hear an occasional cry above the roar that indicated that some one had been hit by a bullet. It was war, and its horror for the first time became apparent to Reuben Denton, but he held to his task, breathing hard, and frequently biting his lips to prevent himself from speaking.

Suddenly a cry arose that the redcoats were flanking them, and the sounds of guns and the little puffs of smoke that arose on the left showed that the report was true. A feeling of terror seized upon the untried men, and leaving their shelter they fled from the place, abandoning two of their cannon and some of their wounded comrades on the field. Some, too, were dead. Crashing through the brush, without order and without plan, the frightened men fled until at last they were safe from a further attack.

Then partially recovering their courage, ashamed and yet not entirely cast down, the militiamen rallied, and after a time were led by their officers until they joined the force commanded by Stirling, and again took a position.

But Cornwallis evidently was hoping that the American army would follow him, and that when they had withdrawn from the hillside he could turn back and intercept and attack them. The greater part had now come down to the plain in the rear of Quibbletown, but they were waiting, not advancing. Over near Westfield lay Stirling and his men, and on the 26th of June

they knew that the British were approaching. Men had been stationed at every pass among the hills, and couriers were ready to bear word swiftly to the leaders.

Again Reuben Denton found himself with his brother and the untried farmers under fire. The fire became hotter, and the few American soldiers, finding themselves greatly outnumbered, began to retreat. There was difficulty in dragging back one of the cannon, and suddenly a British officer darted forward alone, and, with his pistol and hanger, forced the Americans who were dragging at the heavy gun to abandon it. Then suddenly perceiving Lord Stirling himself, he shouted :—

“ Come here, you rebel ; and I will do for you ! ”

Lord Stirling¹ answered by directing four of his men to fire upon the intrepid officer, and in a moment the man fell dead. The cannon were recovered, and then lost again because the Americans had no pistols, or small weapons, to use in their defence.

But the rush of the British hosts could not be checked. Outnumbered, poorly equipped, inexperienced, the force of the militia broke and fled. Scattered among the trees, the men made their way, pursued by the overwhelm-

¹ “ The person who was killed in attempting to take the cannon in the affair of Lord Stirling, was the Honorable Mr. Finch, son of the Earl of Winchelsea, who came out this spring as a volunteer. After he fell, his horse came over and was taken by our army. Finch was buried with great pomp by General Howe.” — *Pennsylvania Journal*, July 16, 1777.

ing numbers of the redcoats. Their brass cannon and nearly sixty of their dead comrades were left behind them, and between one and two hundred became prisoners in the flight. It was a day of disaster, and the main body, soon hearing of the defeat, hastily withdrew to their stronghold on the mountain side, where Reuben Denton, his brother, and all the militia that escaped soon joined them.

But Cornwallis was still of no mind to attack them in such a place, for Bunker Hill was not to be repeated, and the British army, lying on its arms that night at Westfield, moved, on the following day, to Rahway, and on the next day to Amboy, where on the 30th of June, at ten o'clock in the morning, the troops began to cross over to Staten Island, Lord Cornwallis waiting with the rear-guard until two o'clock in the afternoon, when he, too, followed after his companions.

The great campaign of Lord Howe, in New Jersey, had utterly failed. A few militiamen had been killed or taken, but the army under Washington was still intact, and Howe had failed both in defeating it and in moving across the state to Philadelphia. The shrewdness and coolness of Washington had prevailed, and despite all their efforts, the British had not gained one advantage.

In the army, and to remain now, was Reuben Denton. In the days that followed, he, too, shared in the constant fear and anxiety of the men, for no one knew just what Howe would do next.

One day there would come a report that he had taken his army and gone up the Hudson, then this would be contradicted and it would be rumored that with his brother's fleet he had set sail for Boston. Then again there would be word received that all the army had embarked and was on its way by sea toward the capital. At last it was known what his lordship really was doing, for it was learned that he really had sailed for Philadelphia. Then hurriedly the American army began its march across New Jersey, and soon Brandywine and Germantown, Fort Mercer and Fort Mifflin and Valley Forge were names made familiar to all the struggling colonists, though they have no part in this story.

When the American army began its march, Reuben learned that Mr. Coddington was with it, for now that the region of his home had been abandoned, he knew that he could do more as a man in the ranks than as a bearer of news or a scout. It was a source of comfort, both to Reuben and his brother, to have him with them, for not only his bravery but the fact that he had been a neighbor and a friend provided a constant inspiration.

As for Reuben's father and mother and Hannah Coddington, they remained in the place to which they had fled until the war was ended. There Reuben frequently came when he obtained leave of absence, and at last when peace came, there, too, he remained, — "Captain Denton," they called him then, — and in the same house

dwelt Hannah and his father and mother. Mr. Codding-ton, himself, was among those who perished in the terrible winter of Valley Forge.

No word was ever received of the fate of Philip Denton. Whether he had been shot on the night when he had attempted to escape from the Brunswick jail, or was retaken and carried to New York and perished in the sugar-house, no one ever learned. There was a rumor that he had attempted to swim across the Raritan on the night of his escape, and had been drowned; but the rumor never could be verified.

Uncle Philemon and his sister Nancy continued to dwell in their hut until long after peace had come. The old man still found his "signs," and indifferent to the bantering of his friends, still cherished the beliefs he had received in his term of captivity among the Indians. It was said that while the British soldiers were passing Philemon's house on their way to Westfield Uncle Philemon had fled to the forest for shelter, but that his sister Nancy had taken her spinning wheel to the low cellar of the house and there continued her usual occupation until all the redcoats were gone. But Uncle Philemon could never be induced to speak of the matter, so the report never could be confirmed.

Stephen Carle abandoned his secret dealings in horses and came out openly on the side of the British. He survived the war, but his fear of his former neighbors was strong upon him, and he was among the first

of the Tories to flee to the West Indies for a new place of abiding. Nor did he ever return.

Reuben Denton saw General Washington many times in the course of the war, but never was he so impressed by him as he had been when he had seen him, mounted on his little bay horse, on the great rock on the hill-side near his home, looking out over the valley that stretched away in the distance. It was not long before the name of the great leader was given to the rock itself, and to this day all the Jerseymen dwelling in the beautiful region know "Washington's Rock" and point it out to all the visitors that come. To-day it is a place to which young people go for their picnics and festivities. The sounds of light-hearted, joyous laughter are frequently heard there in the beautiful summer days, in marked contrast to the sights and sounds that were common in the trying days of the Revolution. And yet without the one the other could not have been, and for the peace that has come and the friendship restored between the nations that were then engaged in the deadly struggle, let us all be grateful.

Reuben Denton and his brother were engaged in many of the campaigns of the long war, and both were present when Lord Cornwallis at last surrendered his army and his sword at Yorktown and thereby virtually put an end to the contest.

In after years Reuben was accustomed to say that though more stirring experiences had been witnessed

by him, there had not been one in which the prudence and sagacity of the great Washington had been more apparent than when he had prevented Lord Howe from marching across New Jersey to fall upon the feeble little capital at Philadelphia. There were no great battles fought in the campaign, and its very quietness has often led the historian to ignore it, but nevertheless the qualities which afterward were recognized as being the basis of the greatness of the great man were then and there displayed as they were in but few other events in the struggle for the independence of the American colonies.

For the man and the men, for the heritage of a free country and the privileges in which the oppressed of every land have shared, for the harvest which belongs to us all to-day, let us be duly grateful. But let us also not forget the men who labored and into whose labors we have entered. They sowed the seed; we have reaped the harvest. A cloud of witnesses stand all about us, and the faith, determination, and courage of our fathers are not the least of the blessings which they have left for their children's children, not only unto the third and fourth generations, but let us hope to thousands of generations, "world without end."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE FEELINGS OF THE PEOPLE

IT may be of interest to our readers to learn of the feelings of the people of the far-away times with which this story has had to do. As an indication of this, the following quotation from a letter which Lord Howe wrote Lord George Germain, descriptive of the events to which reference has been made, is given :—

“ Having established a corps sufficient for the defence of Amboy, the army assembled at Brunswick on the 12th of June. The enemy’s principal force being encamped on the mountain above Quibbletown, with a corps of two thousand men at Princeton, it was thought advisable to make a movement in two columns from Brunswick on the 14th, in the morning, leaving Brigadier-General Matthew, with two thousand men, to guard the post. The first division, under the command of Lord Cornwallis, advanced to Hillsborough, and the second to Middlebush, under the command of Lieutenant-General de Heister, with a view of drawing on an action if the enemy should remove from the mountain toward the Delaware ; but on finding their intention to keep a position which it would not have been prudent

to attack, I determined, without loss of time, to pursue the principal objects of the campaign by withdrawing the army from Jersey; and in consequence of this determination returned to the camp at Brunswick on the 19th, and marched from thence to Amboy on the 22d, intending to cross to Staten Island, from whence the embarkation was to take place.

"Upon quitting the camp at Brunswick, the enemy brought a few troops forward with two or three pieces of cannon, which they fired at the utmost range without any execution or return from us. They also pushed some battalions into the woods to harass the rear, where Lord Cornwallis commanded, who soon dispersed them with the loss of only two men killed and thirteen wounded—the enemy having nine killed and about thirty wounded.

"The necessary preparations being finished for crossing the troops to Staten Island, intelligence was received that the enemy had removed down from the mountain and taken post at Quibbletown, intending, as it was given out, to attack the rear of the army removing from Amboy,—that two corps had also advanced to their left,—one of three thousand men and eight pieces of cannon, under the command of Lord Stirling, Generals Maxwell and Conway, the last said to be a captain in the French service; the other corps consisting of about seven hundred men with only one piece of cannon.

"In this situation of the enemy, it was judged advisable to make a movement that might lead on to an attack, which was done the 26th, in the morning, in two columns; the right, under the command of Lord Cornwallis and Major-General Grant, Brigadiers Matthew and Leslie, and Colonel Dunlop, took the route by Woodbridge, toward Scotch Plains. The left column, where I was with Major-Generals Sterne, Vaughn, and Gray, and Brigadiers Cleveland and Agnew, marched by Metuchin meeting-house to join the rear of the right column, in the road from thence to Scotch Plains, intending to have taken separate routes, about two miles after the junction, in order to have attacked the enemy's left flank at Quibbletown. Four battalions were detached in the morning, with six pieces of cannon, to take post at Bonhamtown.

"The right column having fallen in with the aforementioned corps of seven hundred men, soon after passing Woodbridge, gave the alarm, by the firing that ensued, to their main army at Quibbletown, which retired to the mountain with the utmost precipitation. The small corps was closely pushed by the light troops, and with difficulty got off their piece of cannon.

"Lord Cornwallis, soon after he was upon the road leading to Scotch Plains from Metuchin meeting-house, came up with the corps commanded by Lord Stirling, whom he found advantageously posted in a country covered with wood, and his artillery well disposed.

The king's troops, vying with each other upon this occasion, pressed forward to such close action, that the enemy, though inclined to resist, could not long maintain their ground against so great impetuosity, but were dispersed on all sides, leaving three pieces of brass ordnance, three captains and sixty men killed, and upwards of two hundred officers and men wounded and taken.

" His lordship had five men killed and thirty wounded. Captain Finch of the light company of the guards was the only officer who suffered, and to my great concern, the wound proving mortal, he died the 29th of June, at Amboy.

" The troops engaged in this action were the First light infantry, First British grenadiers, First, Second, Third Hessian grenadiers, First battalion of guards, Hessian chasseurs, and the Queen's rangers. I take the liberty of particularizing these corps, as Lord Cornwallis, in his report to me, so highly extols their merit and ardor upon this attack. One piece of cannon was taken by the guards, the other two by Colonel Minge-rode's battalion of Hessian grenadiers.

" The enemy were pursued as far as Westfield with little effect, the day proving so intensely hot that the soldiers could with difficulty continue their march thither; in the meantime it gave opportunity for those flying to escape by skulking in the thick woods, until night favored their retreat to the mountains.

"The army lay that night at Westfield, returned the next day to Rahway, and the day following to Amboy. On the 30th, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, the troops began to cross over to Staten Island; and the rear-guard, under the command of Lord Cornwallis, passed at two in the afternoon, without the least appearance of an enemy."

The above is the concise statement of Lord Howe. How the letter and the result of the campaign were looked upon by certain of the Americans, can be judged by the following "poem" by Upcott, and an extract from the *Pennsylvania Post* of the date of July 10th, 1777.

GENERAL HOWE'S LETTER

The substance of Sir W's last letter from New York, versified

As to kidnap the Congress has long been my aim,
 I lately resolv'd to accomplish the same ;
 And, that none, in the glory, might want his due share,
 All the troops were to Brunswick desir'd to repair.
 Derry down, etc.

Here I met them in person, and took the command,
 When I instantly told them the job upon hand ;
 I did not detain them with long-winded stuff,
 But made a short speech, and each soldier looked bluff.

With this omen elated, towards Quibbletown
 I led them, concluding the day was our own ;
 For, till we went thither, the coast was quite clear,—
 But Putnam and Washington, [— —], were there !

I own I was stagger'd, to see with what skill
The rogues were intrench'd on the brow of the hill ;
With a view to dismay them, I show'd my whole force,
But they kept their position, and car'd not a curse.

There were then but two ways, — to retreat or attack,
And to me it seem'd wisest, by far, to go back ;
For I thought, if I rashly got into a fray,
There might both be the Devil and Piper to pay.

Then, to lose no more time, by parading in vain,
I determin'd elsewhere to transfer the campaign ;
So just as we went, we return'd to this place,
With no other diff'rence, — than mending our pace.

Where next we proceed, is not yet very clear,
But, when we get there, be assur'd you shall hear ;
I'll settle that point, when I meet with my brother, —
Meanwhile, we're embarking for some place or other.

Having briefly, my lord, told you, — how the land lies,
I hope there's enough — for a word to the wise ;
'Tis a good horse, they say, that never will stumble, —
But, fighting or flying, — I'm yours very humble.

AN EXTRACT FROM A PATRIOTIC NEWSPAPER

Whereas a certain William Howe, alias General Howe, alias Sir William, alias anything or nothing, has lately gone off, greatly in debt to sundry persons in New Jersey and other parts of the continent, and has not left wherewithal to make payment for the same ; this is therefore to caution all persons not to trust him on any account, as they will certainly lose their money. Said Howe is charged with having, in company with one Cornwallis, not yet taken, broken into several houses in New Jersey, and stolen and carried off many valuable effects ; likewise with being convicted in counterfeiting the cur-

rency of this continent, and of having starved to death several good subjects of the States, while he was chief jailer at New York. He is a very ill-looking fellow, and is an indented servant to a certain George Whelp, alias Guelph, alias King George.

Whoever will secure said Howe in any of the jails of this continent, or will give notice where he is to the American army, shall be handsomely rewarded.

N.B. — He was lately seen skulking about Amboy, Westfield, and Spanktown, in the Jerseys, and has not since been heard of. Should he attempt to practise any more of his villainies, 'tis hoped all persons will be on their guard to apprehend him. — *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 10th, 1777.

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